

異世界料理道

VOLUME
10

Author. EDA
Illust. こちも

Cooking with
wild game.



Cooking with Wild Game

– Isekai Ryouridou –

- Volume 10 -

-Author-

Eda

-Artist-

Kochimo

[Skythewood]

「本当に腹の立つ話だよな！」

どう考えたって、こいつは町だか城だかの人間のしわざだろ」
ルド＝ルウは不機嫌きわまりない様子でそのようにぼやいた。

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「でもさ、これが森辺の民を
陥れる罠だつたとして、
その黒幕は誰なんだろう？」

「ああン？

そんなの、サイクレウスとかいう貴族に
決まつてんだろ？ 他に誰がいるつてんだ？」

ごつごつとした岩肌にもたれつつ、俺はふと息をつく。

頭の上では野鳥が鳴いており、地面には木漏れ日が差し込んできている。朝の森にはさわやかな涼風が吹き、草木や花の香りを届けてくれる。

そうして岩塊の向こう側から聞こえてくるのは、アイ＝ファが水浴びをする涼やかな音色だ。



慌ただしい一日の中でぽっかりと生まれるこういう時間も、俺にとってはかけがえのないものだった。

「ふうん……そういうこと……だからこそ、
ズーロ＝スンは城に引き渡されることを
今さら怖がり始めたのかしら……？」

「え？ ヤミル＝レイにはその理由がわかるのですか？」

「わからないわよ。でも、その話を聞かされたら
自ずと想像ぐらいはつくでしょう？」

長い前髪の向こうから、
今度は得体の知れない光を
たたえたヤミル＝レイの瞳が
見つめ返してくる。



Prologue

The Blue Month That Was Over

Soon after bidding farewell to Shimimaru and Pops Balan, the Blue Month ended.

I only became aware of the calendar during the Blue Month. After hearing that “the House Head Conference will be held on the tenth day of the Blue Month”, I learned for the first time that the months of this world were named by color.

It had been almost 70 days since I came to this world. The month had changed twice before I even knew about that.

I seemed to have met Ai Fa in the Yellow Month. The Yellow Month was followed by the Green Month. The request by House Lutim to prepare for their wedding happened during that month. It was also the time I met Kamyua Yost and started doing business in the Post Station Town.

Those were turbulent days, but the Blue Month was even more hectic. After the House Head Conference, we had to deal with the aftermath of the incident caused by Zattsu Tsun and Tay Tsun, and we got to know Pyschkurewuss who was shrouded in mystery.

I thought the troubles with the Tsun clan would end with Tay Tsun’s death, but unfortunately, it wasn’t so. Another question floated out of the surface: whether Pyschkurewuss was the mastermind directing the Tsun clan’s wrongdoings.

Pyschkurewuss was one of the nobles that ruled Genos. The Forest's Edge of Morga lay within the Genos territory, so the Lord of the denizens of Forest's Edge was Marquis Marstein Genos. Pyschkurewuss was the liaison officer standing between Marstein and Forest's Edge. Pyschkurewuss interacted with the denizens of Forest's Edge as a representative of Marstein.

And this Pyschkurewuss was being suspected of controlling the Tsun clan from the dark. And the one who cast this suspicion was the eldest son of Marstein, the next landlord of Genos, Malfreed, and his associate, the “guardian” Kamyua Yost. Kamyua Yost told Malfred his suspicions about Pyschkurewuss, and it led to all this.

Kamyua Yost was a complicated man. First of all, he took in a boy named Leito as his disciple. Leito was the son of the caravan leader who died from Zattsu Tsun's attack a decade ago.

And there was also the brother-in-law of the innkeeper Milano Mast, who operates the "Kimyusu's Tail Inn". His corpse being found grasping a hunter's necklace was the beginning of everything.

And that was why there was a rumor in the Post Station Town that the culprit behind the attack was a denizen of Forest's Edge. The lawless antics of the Tsun clan in town only added to the townsfolk suspicion towards the Forest's Edge.

However, the nobles of Genos still didn't plan to negotiate with the denizens of Forest's Edge properly. Not just the caravan attack incident, but also the death of the envoys from the neighboring Banam city and the demise of the former captain of the Genos towns guard seemed to be due to assaults by denizens of Forest's Edge. But all these crimes were passed off as the doings of the "Red Beard Gang" bandits.

"Red Beard Gang" had the principles of not taking lives, only targeting aristocrats and wealthy merchants, and sharing the robbed money with the poor. They were thieves of justice. Even though there was no evidence, the "Red Beard Gang" were still made scapegoats and got executed.

That was why Kamyua Yost was so certain that this was a conspiracy by Pyschkurewuss' group. He coerced the Tsun clan to launch these attacks to get rid of people that were in their way and then pushed the crime onto the "Red Beard Gang". Pyschkurewuss only got to his current position by keeping all of this in the dark... That was what Kamyua Yost deduced.

Kamyua Yost shared his deduction with Malfreed. Malfreed had the mindset that 'all sins must be punished', so he was determined to get to the bottom of this matter involving Pyschkurewuss.

But as there wasn't any evidence that could prove that this was all a conspiracy of Pyschkurewuss, they came up with a plan to lure out the villain by organizing a fake Semu-bound caravan.

The plan worked and revealed the crimes of the Tsun clan. The former head of the

Tsun clan that had fallen from grace after the House Head Conference, Zattsu Tsun, attacked the caravan with his trusted aide, Tay Tsun, and was apprehended.

Zattsu Tsun confessed to doing the crime a decade ago, cursed the world, and died in prison with a grudge. Tay Tsun also died because of the twisted fate brought about by Zattsu Tsun. And we cleared one thing up—the ones who attacked the caravan ten years ago wasn't the "Red Beard Gang", but Zattsu Tsun's group.

Hence, Kamyua Yost's group worked on this only lead to uncover Pyschkurewuss' crimes and embarked on a search for the only survivor of the "Red Beard Gang", the significant other of the boss.

So they made a request to the denizens of Forest's Edge and borrowed three hunters from the Wu clan branch houses. With these three hunters and Leito, Kamyua Yost set off from Genos on the last day of the Blue Month.

But on that very day, something shocking happened.

Someone claiming to be the son of that significant other of the boss appeared before us.

He claimed to be Geta, the son of the "Red Beard Gang" boss Goram. He was a youth with fiery red hair and yellow beast-like eyes. He came to Genos to get revenge on the denizens of Forest's Edge who made his father the scapegoat.

Kamyua Yost who was looking for Geta's mother just happened to miss him; what a twist of fate. Geta refused to listen to us and disappeared.

Pyschkurewuss ordered the denizens of Forest's Edge to hand over all Tsun clan members who transgressed the law for sentencing by Genos. He demanded not only the house head Zuro Tsun, but also everyone in the main house. Diga, Doddo, Yamiel Lei, Zwei, Aura... They were forgiven by the denizens of Forest's Edge after they broke off ties with the Tsun clan, but Pyschkurewuss had his eyes set on them.

To submit or to resist? There was only half a month before the decision would be made in the next half a month. The denizens of Forest's Edge had to determine their own path by the 15th of the White Month.

Would Pyschkurewuss' crimes become uncovered and the tables turned... During this

crucial juncture, Geta appeared, marking an end to the turbulent Blue Month.

Would Kamyua Yost find Geta's mother?

What was Pyschkurewuss true intention for demanding for the members of the Tsun clan main house?

And, why did he push back the conference by half a month?

Could the denizens of Forest's Edge come to an understanding with Geta?

We ushered in the end of the Blue Month amidst all these questions.

Chapter 1

A day in Asuta's life, 1st of the White Month (1)

1

With all sorts of problems looming in the background, this day began peacefully.

We worked hard towards the goal of “bringing a prosperous life to Forest’s Edge” in our own way. No matter what conspiracies we got embroiled in, this remained our primary goal.

Speaking of which, our business had gotten on track, so my life had become stable. The atmosphere in the Forest’s Edge and Genos was calm, so life was peaceful.

I had lived in the Forest’s Edge settlement for 70 days, but I didn’t feel any change in the temperature or the length of the daytime. The climate was comparable to early summer in Japan. There wasn’t any clock here, so based on what I felt, the sunrise and sunset were around 6am and 7pm.

The Fa house ate dinner around dusk and turned in for bed two hours later. I usually chatted with Ai Fa before sleeping but would get drowsy if there was only the light of the animal fats candle to lit the room.

If what I felt was accurate, the Fa house slept at a very healthy 9pm. But I wasn’t sure if a day was 24 hours in this world too. As we didn’t have any clocks, I couldn’t tell how long we actually slept.

Even if the numbers were uncertain, the fact remained that we were living a very healthy lifestyle. After working for a day, we ate kiba, slept soundly, and got up well-rested and ready for the next day’s work. It was a routineus and meaningful way of living.

And so, this was the 1st of the White Month.

Ai Fa was already up when I opened my eyes.

“Ahh... Good morning, Ai Fa.”

I rubbed my drowsy eyes as I propped myself up, and Ai Fa responded “Yes.” with a nod.

She sat cross-legged in the middle of the room and was nimbly tying up her long blonde hair. I loved the morning that began with the white light shining through the window. Just the sight of Ai Fa was enough to spur me to work hard today too.

“Get ready too, we need to draw water today.”

“Oh, right.”

I stretched my back and walked to the storage room.

I went there to change my clothes. Normally, the Fa house would do laundry and clean up last night’s dinner at the same time.

I changed into a new set of cloth around my waist and a vest-like shirt inside the room which contained cracked boards, half-dried firewood and a saw hanging on the wall. I only had one T-shirt, so I washed it carefully every day.

On the inside wall was a set of white chef uniform.

It goes without saying that these were the clothes I was wearing when I got transported into this world. Inside the pockets should be my cleaned socks and underwear.

Ever since Ai Fa gifted a set of Forest's Edge clothes to me, I had yet to wear it again. This long-sleeved chef uniform wasn’t suitable for this climate, and there seemed to be a custom in Forest's Edge of treating people wearing swirlly clothes as their tribemate.

However, this is Semu cloth in the first place. Shumimaru also wore the same thing under his cloak, and that will remain the same if he marries into the Forest's Edge.

I thought about the easterner I bade farewell to yesterday, the band leader of the

“Silver Vase”, Shumimaru. No matter how the relationship between Vena Wu and him developed, it would have to wait until half a year later when he returns to Genos.

He should be preparing for his journey right now.

The architects from the south, Pops Balan, Arudas and the others should be preparing to do the same.

As I was thinking about all that, someone knocked on the door from the outside.

“Hey, did you fall asleep in there? I will leave you behind if you dally any longer.”

“Yes, I’m coming.”

I rolled my T-shirt and other laundry into a bundle, tied it onto my waist, and exited the storage room.

First, we carried the water flask and pot filled with food. I rolled the flask to the entrance, while Ai Fa carried the pot and followed behind.

“Yo, good morning Gilulu.”

When we went outside, Gilulu was already tied to a tree.

Recently, Ai Fa would take Gilulu first thing after waking up. I also suspect that she was combing Gilulu’s feathers in secret, but regrettably, I had yet to see this as I wake up later than her.

Anyway, we put the water flask and pot onto a tow board tied by vines and headed for the water source.

It would be easier if Gilulu helped us out here, but it would be embarrassing for just the Fa house to be so thick-skinned, and this also served as training for the weaker member of the household. Traveling to and fro the Post Station Town was already a breeze; if I also forego this training, I would regress to a modern-age weakling.

So as usual, Ai Fa watched out for any of the load falling off, while I dragged the tow board behind me.

The water source was a rocky area some distance from the Fa house. There was a stream branching out from the Lanto river here, and the clear water flowed over the uneven rocks. The flowing water formed a depression where people could draw water easily from.

There were already four women at the water source.

They were women from the nearby Fou and Lan houses.

These were the only two houses sharing this spot with the Fa house. The Gazu, Latzu and Bemu houses were further to the south, while the Sudora and Dean houses were to the north.

The moment we walked over, one of the women got up and said: "Ahh..."

The women around the vicinity often visited the Fa house to learn cooking, but there were still some of them whom I didn't know.

Hmm... But I think I saw her somewhere before...

While I was tilting my head puzzledly, Ai Fa acknowledged that woman with a gaze silently.

But that woman clenched her fist and lowered her eyes feebly.

The other three ladies smiled at us.

"Ara, it's Asuta and Ai Fa. We are already done drawing the water; please help yourselves."

After saying "Thank you very much", I pulled the tow board into the water.

The woman, who acted uneasily just now, ran off to the side as if she was fleeing.

Ai Fa remained expressionless and quiet.

For some reason, I could feel the unusual air between the two of them.

"Erm, Asuta, we want to learn cooking from you today, do you have time?"

The older Lan house lady asked, and I replied with a nod: "Yes, I do."

"Rii Sudora will be coming later too, so it's fine."

"That's great. Actually, we are thinking of challenging hamburg steak... But... Can we actually make it?"

"You will be fine. The most important thing is practicing daily. When I first started learning, I charred the patty badly too."

"Really? That's really hard to imagine."

The women from the Lan house smiled.

They seemed to be smiling more lately.

And of course, being free from the tyranny of the Tsun clan was the main reason, but I thought their life turning prosperous also played a part.

The happiness was a mixture of obtaining wealth from selling the meat to the Fa house and the joy of eating delicious meals. This was exactly what I was hoping for. They were filled with bliss now and very interested in improving their culinary skills.

"The bloodletting yesterday was a failure. The kiba struggled too much, and we had to stab it to death."

"The important thing is that the men didn't suffer any serious wounds. After that, we washed the meat in salt water like what Asuta taught us."

"Oh, was the stench removed?"

"Yes. The men already removed as much blood as they could. We then marinated it in fruit wine and myam, and the stench was basically gone."

"It's not good enough for sale, but we are fine with eating it ourselves."

She said with a cheerful smile.

"I will be counting on you to teach us cooking then. I will tell the daughter of the Dean house too."

"You mean Tulu?"

"That's right. That girl didn't get to see you much recently and is feeling lonely. She will be old enough to marry in a few years..."

I laughed in reply and stole a glance at my house head standing beside me.

Ai Fa was washing the plates quietly and didn't seem to have heard our conversation.

The woman, who acted strangely in the beginning, started filling her water flask with a gloomy face.

After seeing her listless face, I suddenly recognized her. She was the woman from the Fou house who visited the Fa house previously... before the Tsun clan's fall from grace, the person who gave us Pico leaves in return for the hides Ai Fa gifted them, Celice Lan Fou.

No wonder I couldn't remember. That was when I first started doing business in the Post Station Town, which was a month ago.

And she was carrying a baby smaller than Kota Wu back then. She had to take care of the baby, so she didn't have a chance to learn cooking or draw water. So that thin baby became healthy enough to not need constant care anymore. I was glad that the wealth brought in by the Fa house had such an effect.

"I will see you again after the day's work is done."

"Yes, I will be waiting for your visit."

The Fou and Lan house women left together.

In the end, Celice Lan Fou didn't say anything, and Ai Fa didn't raise her head.

After finishing the laundry, next would be house chores and the preparation of the merchandise.

After hanging the clothes by the window, we busied ourselves with our own tasks. For me, that's cooking poitan, blade maintenance for the kitchen knives, and inspecting the food store.

Incidentally, Ai Fa's daily job was caring for her blades. Aside from that, she chopped firewood if there was a need, or maybe made some jerky or dried some Pico leaves. Today, she chose to do the latter.

I boiled the poitan into a goo and then laid it in the sun together with Ai Fa's Pico leaves. After all the other chores were done, we walked to the forest to forage for firewood, herbs, and krilee fruits.

And of course, bathing was done daily. The Fou house and Lan house washed further downstream so we couldn't run into them by the river.

After entering the woods for twenty minutes, we arrived at the Lanto river. The boulder which was as tall as a person marked Ai Fa's and my bathing spot.

I let my house head bathe first, then leaned against the boulder and sat down. After handing me her hunter's cape and necklace, she went around the boulder.

I could go forage during this time too, but Ai Fa didn't really want us to be too far apart in the forest since some willful kiba might wander around at this time. I had been attacked by a kiba before so I couldn't make Ai Fa worry.

But the forest is really peaceful today.

I sighed in relief as I leaned against the uneven boulder.

Wild birds tweeted above me, and light poured down through the gaps in the trees. A gentle breeze flowed through the morning woods, bringing the fragrance of the flowers and grass with it. The sound of Ai Fa bathing came from behind the boulder. For me, this moment was a precious treasure on a busy day.

“Nice weather today huh, Ai Fa.”

I asked her a little loudly, and Ai Fa replied with a “Yes.”

As long as Ai Fa was with me, it wouldn't feel awkward even if we both stayed quiet.

But I wanted to chat with Ai Fa right now.

I was thinking about a topic when I remembered what happened earlier.

“Erm... Ai Fa, do you have any special relationship with Celice Lan Fou?”

She didn't answer right away.

That was rare for Ai Fa who always gave immediate responses.

She then said emotionally: “There isn't any relationship to speak off...”

“...Just that, I knew Celice Lan Fou when we were young.”

“Ah! Childhood friends! Ai Fa actually has childhood friends!”

I was shocked.

But on second thought, it wasn't that surprising. The Fa house must have gotten along with the neighboring houses before they got on the Tsun clan's bad side.

“So, why are things so awkward between you two? There's no need to worry about the Tsun clan anymore, so you can mend your relationship with her, just like you did with Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba, right?”

“Can the relationship between people... be mended so easily?”

Ai Fa's voice was emotionless but didn't seem as strong-willed as usual. I reflected on my thoughtlessness.

Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba didn't break off ties with Ai Fa. Ai Fa was the one who avoided them in order to keep them away from trouble.

But the Fou and Lan houses were different. They chose to ostracize the Fa house voluntarily out of fear of the Tsun clan.

Even so, Ai Fa still secretly gave kiba hides to them. In order to avoid detection by the Tsun clan, she gave them financial assistance in the dark. Doing this was worth it, as the Fou and Lan houses concurred with the Fa house during the House Head

Conference. They hoisted their flag of rebellion before the tyrannical tribal chief clan.

With the demise of the Tsun clan, the Fa house mended their ties with the other houses. The head of the Fou house regretted his earlier actions and lowered his head in apology, repairing his ties with the Fa house.

Everything seemed to have been resolved... And I never suspected for 1 personal differences still to be lingering. It never occurred to me that Ai Fa had a childhood friend.

Just what kind of feelings did Celice Lan Fou hold when she cut ties with Ai Fa? And how does she feel now?

Was she afraid of approaching Ai Fa because of her guilt...?

“Asuta, stop thinking about strange things...”

Ai Fa's voice came again.

“The Tsun clan is just one of the reasons. There are no bonds between Celice Lan Fou and me now so our ties won't be mended just because the Tsun clan has fallen.”

“...Yes. I also feel that there is no point in wasting effort on futile endeavours.”

I replied.

Ai Fa was a charming person, that's why the Fou, Lan, and Sudora houses all gathered at the Fa house.

Although striving for a more prosperous life was their goal, I still thought that the Fou and Sudora house heads were drawn in by Ai Fa's charm— by her capability as a hunter and her righteousness as a denizen of Forest's Edge.

So I was certain that there was no need to rush, and that Celice Lan Fou would return to Ai Fa's side one day.

“You are so stubborn, Ai Fa. Can't you take the initiative instead?”

I said quietly in order to not agitate Ai Fa.

But she poured cold water on top of my head the next instant.

I turned my head back with a “Uwah!” and found a dripping wet Ai Fa standing on top of the boulder with her hair down looking at me. I couldn’t see below her shoulders, but since her hands were extended towards me, it must have been her doing.

“What the hell, that’s going too far!”

“Who’s going too far? How dare you say your house head is stubborn?”

“Ah, you heard that... Huh? Your reaction is too fast though?”

“That’s right. I can sense when you are going to say something rude, so I waited in ambush to get back at you.”

“So you were already lying in wait! What were you going to do if I didn’t say anything rude!?”

“Who knows. This is all the will of the forest.”

Ai Fa shrugged with a straight face.

Her shoulders were also wet, so she probably didn’t even have time to dress in her hurry to get back at me.

“You are not wearing clothes behind that boulder, right? What if someone watches from the river bank on the other end?”

I retorted, and Ai Fa pulled her head back immediately.

“You wait right there. I will give you your punishment for your insolence just now.”

“Just get dressed already! I also want to take off my clothes and bathe!”

Faint laughter came from the other side of the boulder.

Did her mood change for the better after taking a bath, or did her mood improved after teaching her rude family a lesson? I didn’t know the reason, but it’s great that Ai Fa

had cheered up.

After finishing our bath, we returned to the forest to forage.

First, we needed to forage for Pico leaves to preserve meat, lilo for making jerky and “Braised kiba”, and krilee fruit for bug repellent.

On the side note, I had never been troubled by the body odor of the denizens of Forest's Edge before. The denizens ate plenty of meat, bathed just once a day, and lived in such a warm and humid place, but my sensitive nose had not been stung by the odor so far.

The first reason that came to mind was the herbs and krilee fruit. The denizens of Forest's Edge wore these fruits as bangles to repel insects, and the fragrance of half-blooming flowers drifted into my nasal cavity.

The women would often come into contact with Pico leaves and lilo leaves too, and both of them had the refreshing smell of herbs. Dried Pico leaves became a spice similar to black pepper.

It might be the result of their bodies absorbing these herbs, or just the fragrance of the herbs itself... Instead of the odor of humans, the denizens of Forest's Edge smelled like the forest itself, with the fragrance of the trees, earth, and flowers.

On top of that, Ai Fa also used a “fruit that attracts kiba”. It had been many years since the ‘sacrificial hunting method’, which involved smearing the fruit onto one’s body, was last performed. However, the smell of that fruit was much stronger than krilee fruit, and when used to set up her traps, some of it would still get on her hair, body or clothes.

So Ai Fa had a fragrance that was stronger than anything else on her body. As we foraged in the forest, her freshly-bathed body started sweating, and I felt that sweet fragrance getting even stronger.

One time I joked that: “I want to pound you like a kiba!” and she kicked me hard several times.

Leaving that aside, we spent an hour every day foraging for herbs. After that was done, I could finally start preparing the food to be sold in the Post Station Town.

However, since the grilled poitan used for the “Myam-roasted meat” and the meat patty for the “Kiba burger” had been delegated to Leina Wu, I just needed to make the poitan for the “Kiba burger” and prepare the sauce for the “Myam-roasted meat”.

The poitan I left outside to dry before heading into the forest had solidified, so I soaked it in water before grilling them on the griddle. There were 60 grilled poitan for the “Kiba burger”, and it wasn’t too much trouble after getting used to it.

Which meant, I had an extra 40 to 50 minutes free today.

It was all thanks to the Wu clan taking on some of my chores and the wagon shortening the traveling time.

“But I don’t have anything to do even with the extra free time. I will chop some wood.”

Ai Fa who was chewing jerky said: “That’s my job.”

“If you did that, I won’t have anything to do.”

The Wu clan would be the guards for today, so Ai Fa was staying behind to housesit.

Usually, Ai Fa would idle until noon time and take care of miscellaneous chores after I left the house.

“Ai Fa, why don’t you sleep for a while? Don’t the men from the other houses also sleep until noon before getting up?”

“But I’m not sleepy at all. I have been sleeping and getting up at the same time for years. I can’t just change my routine so easily.”

After her mother died when she was 13, Ai Fa had been working from dawn to dusk, and worked together with her father until she was 15. No one else in Forest's Edge had worked as hard as she did.

“It can’t be helped then. This isn’t enough time to research cooking, and I don’t have any other preparation work to do.”

My job in the afternoon was cutting the meat to be used for the “Myam-roasted meat”

and the dishes in the inn. After being liberated from the preparation work for the “Kiba burger”, my workload had been lightened significantly.

I could finish these tasks in 40 to 50 minutes— but I would need to cover the sliced meat with Pico leaves, and the meat’s moisture would get absorbed. This would waste the Pico leaves and change the meat’s texture a fair bit.

The change in texture didn’t mean the taste would turn bad. In fact, the taste would get stronger so I could research a way to make use of the meat patty that lost its moisture. However, I couldn’t stand the thought of using even more Pico leaves. The Fa house was already using a lot of Pico leaves to preserve the meat used for cooking, so I wanted to keep it within the amount we could forage in a day.

“...Oh right, instead of finishing the work early, I should postpone my chores until the next morning instead.”

I clapped my hands.

So if I postponed the work that I usually did one day earlier to the morning itself, I could free up an entire afternoon to research cooking. This was wonderful and I couldn’t help smiling. But Ai Fa looked at me with dubious eyes and said:

“But I will still be free today. So, is there anything else I can do?”

“Nope. If you are free, just rest... You won’t have time to rest until after dinner, correct?”

Ai Fa leaned against the wall and sat down, and then said:

“When I can’t sleep, I will rest like this. Not wasting energy is also my duty.”

“Yes. Thanks to Gilulu, we don’t need to carry heavy loads anymore. I’m a bit worried that my endurance and arm strength would regress.”

“...Endurance and arm strength?”

“Ah, that’s right. It’s nothing compared to denizens of Forest’s Edge born and bred here.”

Ai Fa once said that I was as strong as a ten-year-old child in Forest's Edge.

I was throwing my temper a little. Ai Fa brushed back her bangs as she stood up and walked towards me without a word.

She then grabbed my arms silently.

"W-What? You mad?"

"I won't get angry without a reason."

She muttered quietly as she massaged my arms.

My T-shirt was still being dried, so I was just wearing my vest. She touched me from shoulder to forearm, and I felt complicated about that.

"Hmm... After feeling you up, I think you are stronger now."

"Really? You said I was similar to a ten years old kid not too long ago."

"Yes. You are comparable to a twelve-year-old now."

"...Is that so?"

No matter what, having age of twelve years meant being almost old enough to be an apprentice hunter. If I had reached that level, that signified I had grown a lot... I should be happy about this.

"Then I can compete with Shin Wu's younger brother, what an honor!"

"Yes, you might even win."

So that was the extent of my power level.

I became depressed, and Ai Fa put a hand on my arm a little worriedly.

"What's the matter? Did I upset you?"

"Not really. Being massaged like that feels a little good."

“Massage?”

“That’s right, loosening the muscles and veins allows better blood circulation, so it will feel good.”

After replying “I see”, Ai Fa’s fingers moved towards my armpits.

I backed away with a “Uwah!”

“Why are you running away? Didn’t you say it feels good?”

Ai Fa hands stopped in mid-air and she looked surprised.

I started laughing loudly.

“Sorry, it was just ticklish. I’m not mad about it, but please spare me.”

“Ticklish? I don’t think it’s ticklish...”

Ai Fa tilted her head and tickled her armpit.

Of course, it won’t be ticklish if done by herself.

“...I remember getting beat up by Ai Fa just because I poked you a little.”

“Hmm? Did that happen?”

“And you hit me when I patted your head.”

“I was just unhappy that you treated me like a kid. I won’t feel upset about it now.”

Ai Fa continued walking towards me with a serious face.

“I’m not lying, you know?”

“Huh? I don’t think you are lying at all.”

“Then, give it a try.”

“...Huh?”

“Come on.”

What the hell.

What was with this situation... Ai Fa looked completely serious. Was there something I didn't understand about her and it compelled her to become serious?

I didn't want to upset Ai Fa so early in the morning, so I suppressed my embarrassment and followed Ai Fa's instructions.

I put my hand on her head.

Her hair was dry now, and they were warm and nice to the touch.

I caressed her head and took care not to mess up her tied up hair, and said “Good girl”...Ai Fa suddenly laughed out loud.

“Yes, it's not upsetting at all.”

Was that all!? I was so tense.

She made me all worried like a fool.

But getting to see her sweet smile made this morning a big victory... although I wasn't sure what did I win. After dropping me into a barren dungeon, Ai Fa's gentle voice was the thing that saved me from that hellish landscape.

“Asuta, I can't go to the Post Station Town with you today.”

Ai Fa said as she held my left hand.

Her voice was gentle but her eyes were serious. I removed my hand from her head and nodded with a “Yes.”

“I was the one who decided to visit the town every other day. The Wu clan who was in their hunting offseason should be taking on the responsibility as guards, but I insisted

on not leaving it all to them... So I decided to go every other day."

"Yes, I know how you feel, Ai Fa."

Ai Fa still had her job as a hunter to do. We had plenty of money and could procure meat from the other houses, so Ai Fa didn't really need to hunt... But her pride as a hunter compelled her. It would make sense if there weren't enough people, but the Wu clan were free now so Ai Fa performing escort duties would mean neglecting her work as a hunter.

So Ai Fa decided on the rule of going to the Post Station Town every other day. She probably decided on this as she could obtain the same results even after reducing her time in the forest by half.

She already told me about this a few days ago.

However, a troubling factor appeared, which worried Ai Fa.

That was Geta who attacked us in the Post Station Town.

The denizens of Forest's Edge decided to assign us escorts to guard against any danger posed by Pyschkurewuss. But the danger came towards us from an unexpected angle.

"Donda Wu was already informed about what happened yesterday. The Wu clan has plenty of men, so Donda Wu promised to send enough people to escort us."



"Ah, I see."

"That Geta yesterday wasn't that great. That man from the branch house, Shin Wu, isn't much weaker than him. Ludo Wu should be able to fend him off effortlessly."

"Yes. And Geta got hurt badly by Sangjura."

"...If that Sangjura is an enemy, Ludo Wu might be in danger. That's why I asked Donda Wu to send more escorts. So, Asuta... don't be reckless."

Ai Fa's innocent face from earlier suddenly turned serious. I could see how worried she was from her incredibly tense expression.

Despite that, Ai Fa and I still braced ourselves. She had to do her job as a hunter, while I had to work in the Post Station Town. Ai Fa held my left hand and I nodded firmly in response to her.

"I promise that I won't be reckless. Let's do our jobs and then come home safely!"

Ai Fa acknowledged with a grunt and then squinted her eyes with satisfaction... She then put my hand on her breasts.

I was surprised by that immediately, but she released my hand slowly.

"I believe you, Asuta."

"Y-Yeah, don't worry!"

I was all worked up early in the morning.

But I still committed to my duties.

I had to do my work in the Post Station Town.

And then return to the Fa house.

Not just today, but every day.

Just like how Ai Fa returned home every day after her dangerous hunt, I needed to

return home safely from any danger Pyschkurewuss might have poised towards me.

And I had to try to subdue the youth Geta who claimed to be the child of red-haired Goram and bring him before Donda Wu and the other tribal chiefs. I also needed to work hard to build a cordial relationship with Michael of Toran that Shumimaru introduced to us. Since the Wu clan would be guarding me, I needed to do my job too.

I thought about all this as I invited Ai Fa to sit with me by the wall so we could rest and chat before our work began.

2

The sun rose to the spot between the top of the sky and the horizon... which felt like 9 am to me. I wore my dried T-shirt under my vest and started my leisurely journey towards the Wu clan village.

There were several routes from the Forest's Edge settlement towards the Post Station Town. We usually took the route with a suspended bridge that was closer to the Fa house, or the one that was closer to the Wu clan.

The shortest route would take an hour by foot to reach the Post Station Town. But we couldn't drive a wagon there due to a suspended bridge along that route.

The route closest to the Wu clan would take almost two hours by foot. Heading to the Wu clan would require an hour, and heading to the Post Station Town from there would spend 40 to 50 minutes. But that time became shortened greatly by riding a Totos. I had slowly gotten used to driving a Totos' wagon and could reach the Post Station Town in just 45 minutes.

Walking to the Post Station Town took an hour in the past, so it had only been reduced by 20 minutes. But we had always been carrying the heavy loads by hand, and the work we avoided by doing so was very significant.

And Vena Wu needed to visit the Fa house every day to carry these goods. By saving these two hours, she could work more efficiently.

And of course, these two hours were used to prepare the "Kiba burger". Since Shela Wu was already making the grilled poitan, these two jobs meshed well together.

Furthermore, the two girls heading directly from the Wu clan to the Post Station Town would have a more consistent working time. It took 40 minutes to reach the Post Station Town from the Fa house, but just 20 minutes from the Wu clan. Walking would need 40 to 50 minutes, so that was 20 to 30 minutes faster. Including the journey back, that would save a little bit less than an hour that could be used to do other work.

In the terms of labor I set with the Wu clan, the only condition that needed to be followed strictly was the working time so I couldn't let them work in the Fa house during this excess time. This was the warning Mama Mia Lei gave me. So I decided to use this freed time for preparation work, and if time and manpower permitted, I let them forage for firewood.

After settling on this new plan, I would be linking up with everyone at the Wu clan before heading down to the Post Station Town.

The members today were Leina Wu, Shela Wu, Lala Wu, the two guards Ludo Wu and Shin Wu from yesterday, as well as two other youths from the branch houses. The branch houses' youths sat in the wagon together with us, while Ludo Wu and Shin Wu sat on the Wu clan's Totos, Lulu.

"When Asuta goes to the inn in the afternoon, the Lei and Lutim houses would each send two men to guard the stall."

Leina Wu told me on the way to the Post Station Town.

That would make 8 escorts in total... which was the same defensive set up as against Zattsu Tsun. This might be overdoing it a little, but with the threat of Pyschkurewuss and Geta who was hell-bent on vengeance against the denizens of Forest's Edge, this was necessary.

When we reached the stone-paved road of the Post Station Town, we were showered with more worried and guarded gazes than usual.

Having four employees and four hunters gave the impression of high security. Compared to Ai Fa and Ludo Wu being the escorts yesterday, I could feel that the townsfolk was much more panicky. We could only endure all this in silence before resolving the issue with Geta.

“Ah, good morning, Milano Mast.”

When we arrived at the “Kimyusu’s Tail Inn”, Milano Mast just happened to be outside.

Milano Mast nodded with a grunt and then went to the back of the inn ahead of us. I followed with Leina Wu, Ludo Wu, and Shin Wu to retrieve the two stalls.

“...Yesterday, the innkeepers held a meeting.”

Milano Mast said quietly as we pulled out the stall from a shed.

“Are you catering for the ‘West Wind Inn’?”

“Huh? That’s not firmed up yet.”

I answered in surprise, and Milano Mast averted his face with a “Is that so”.

“It’s the girl from the ‘West Wind Inn’ who said that. So I decided to visit the ‘Big Tree of the South Inn’ to see how good you really are.”

“I see. But that innkeeper seemed to loathe the denizens of Forest’s Edge, so I’m not sure how things will turn out.”

I answered and shared my thoughts with him.

“And... I would prefer selling my dishes in the ‘Kimyusu’s Tail Inn’ first.”

“What?”

Milano Mast widened his eyes in surprise.

“Are you kidding me? You want to sell your dishes in this inn?”

“Yes. If I’m going to sell kiba dishes in an inn targeting the westerner client base, I want to do so in the ‘Kimyusu’s Tail Inn’ first. And of course, the ‘Big Tree of the South Inn’ and ‘Cryptic Venerable Inn’ have many westerner customers too... But their primary customers are still southerners and easterners.”

“I don’t understand. Why are you so adamant about my inn?”

“It’s because Milano Mast has been taking good care of us, so accepting the offer from your competitor will make me feel bad...”

Milano Mast stayed quiet with a grumpy face.

I looked at his face and continued: “However, I don’t plan to expand my business too much right now. I don’t want to cause trouble for my business partners because of associating with me.”

“What? No matter how complicated the relationship between you and the people in the city becomes, no one will disrupt your business, correct?”

I had already explained to my business associates, Milano Mast, Uncle Dora, Neil, and Naudiz the reason I needed to bring escorts.

However, I still felt that saying the name Pyschkurewuss would be dangerous and only told them that “there is a difference in opinions between us and the people in the city over how to deal with the criminals who defiled the grace of the forest.”

“That’s what I thought yesterday, but there has been a new development.”

“What is it, some new incident?”

“Yes Milano Mast, I already planned to tell you...”

I told him about the son of Red Beard Goram, Geta.

A decade ago, a bandit gang was executed for the crimes committed by the denizens of Forest's Edge. The son of that gang's boss had appeared in Genos to seek vengeance.

This might reach the ears of Pyschkurewuss so I couldn’t spread this out. But I still wanted to tell this to just Milano Mast.

“The ‘Red Beard Gang’ huh. That’s a name I haven’t heard in a long time.”

Milano Mast muttered unhappily as he crossed his short and thick arms.

“There’s no need to risk injury over this sort of person. Just hold your chest up high

and do your job if you don't feel any guilt."

"I might not be in the wrong, but the atrocities committed by the Tsun clan remain a fact."

"The criminals have been punished, who has the rights to force an additional punishment on you?"

Milano Mast looked at me, Leina Wu, and the others as he said that.

"You lot were just a bunch of sniveling kids ten years ago anyway, how can he blame this on you? And you mentioned that Geta attacked you without any warning, correct?"

"Y-Yes."

"That sort of behavior cannot be tolerated, no matter how much he hates the denizens of Forest's Edge. His father known for being a thief of justice must be sighing in the heavens over his son's recklessness."

Milano Mast seemed very angry.

Only Milano Mast had the right to be furious over Geta's actions. He also lost his precious family over this matter, but Milano Mast endured this terrible fate in silence.

"Anyway, let the guards handle people like him. And there are no retards who will dare attack a stall in the Post Station Town. If anyone tries, let the guards stab them dead."

"Okay... But Milano Mast, what do you think?"

"Huh?"

"Can I sell the dishes made by me in the 'Kimyusu's Tail Inn'? Leaving the issue with Geta aside from now, I want to cater food for the 'Kimyusu's Tail Inn', or at least start doing so at the same time as the 'West Wind Inn'."

Milano Mast was so surprised that his mouth became a thin line.

He then said: "Impossible."

“So it’s no good...”

“Obviously. What if my other dishes won’t sell at all after I start catering yours? I can’t accept such a dangerous proposition.”

“Huh? But not all the westerners will choose to buy the kiba dish, right?”

“Even if you say that, they won’t want to eat my and my daughter’s cooking after trying yours. This inn doesn’t depend on the profits from the dishes in the first place.”

Kamyua Yost told me before that because Milano Mast lost his wife young, the quality of the cooking in the “Kimyusu’s Tail Inn” was worse than the other inns.

I clenched my fist to muster my courage and said:

“Then... Why don’t I teach you both how to cook?”

Milano Mast widened his eyes in shock.

“I’m very sorry for my sudden suggestion... I had never tried cooking kimyusu and karon meat, so I’m not sure what kind of dishes I can make, but I might be of some help.”

“W-Why are you doing so much for us!? Are you trying to con my money under the pretense of teaching us?”

“I won’t take your money for this sort of things. If I can sell kiba cookings in the ‘Kimyusu’s Tail Inn’ because of this, it’s a worthwhile venture. And... You have always been taking care of us, so this is my way of thanking you.”

“I don’t remember giving you any special treatment!”

“Is that so? Then Milano Mast must be helping us unconsciously.”

I showed a natural smile.

Milano Mast looked even more troubled.

"If things go smoothly, the job at the 'Big Tree of the South Inn' will end early tomorrow. I will then have time to visit the kitchen of the 'Kimyusu's Tail Inn', will that be alright?"

After pondering over it for a while, Milano Mast answered: "I can't answer without consulting my daughter."

There were still two hours before noon... which felt like 10am to me.

We set off after getting the two carts from the "Kimyusu's Tail Inn", and visited Uncle Dora's stall.

"Yo, Asuta, you getting the usual today too?"

"Hmm, I won't need pula today. I will be changing the menu for the 'Cryptic Venerable Inn'."

"Oh, I see. Taking away the price of the pula..."

In the past, I came to buy vegetables midway through the business or on the way back, but after getting my own wagon, I chose to procure all the required ingredients in the morning.

I needed 48 aria and 8 tino for the stall. The inn would require 100 aria.

I would also need 30 aria and 150 poitan to prepare for the next day's business.

That was how much ingredients I bought at Uncle Dora's stall.

Minusing the cost of the pula, that was 82 red copper plates in total.

"There aren't many customers who buy so many aria and poitan like you. To be honest, I'm making a pretty penny thanks to you."

Uncle Dora said with a laugh.

Tara was smiling beside him too.

The fat Dora and Tara, who was skinnier than Rimee Wu, resembled each other when

they smiled.

“Normally, the aria and poitan won’t get sold out. After a period of time, when they are starting to go bad, I would sell them to the farm in Dabag as karon feed. It can only fetch half its price, so I have been making a good profit for the past two months.”

“It’s a great help that I don’t need to worry about your vegetables here getting sold out. By the way... will it be fine if I buy another 100 arias?”

“Huh!? You are getting more?”

“No, I’m not sure yet. If my business with the inns expands even more, I will need to buy that much more.”

Uncle Dora was visibly moved and nodded his round head:

“Then I won’t need to sell the aria to Dabag! Of course that will be fine!”

“That’s great then. Ah... but will that result in the price of the karon feed increasing and inflate the price of karon meat?”

“No, it won’t. I’m not the only one selling aria. It will just reduce the number of aria that didn’t get sold to the farm and had to be thrown away.”

“Then it’s all good.”

I answered while checking the amount of aria, and Uncle Dora who was also counting the copper plates tilted his head puzzledly.

“Asuta, you are always worrying about other people’s shops. Won’t it be a good thing if the price of karon meat increases?”

“Not at all, I don’t want the butchery and the other stalls to bear a grudge against me, I just want to do my business in peace.”

“Well, competition will arise naturally in the course of business, so I feel that you don’t need to worry about all that.”

“Yes, I feel that your thinking is correct... But as a denizen of Forest’s Edge, I don’t want

to earn the ire of others.”

When he heard my response, Uncle Dora showed a complicated expression.

“Asuta, you are doing proper business here. Don’t worry, there aren’t any criminals anymore, so things will change for the better now.”

I hoped for the same thing too.

But we would need to settle things with Pyschkurewuss and Geta at the very least.

As I was searching for the words to say, Tara who had been listening to us quietly tugged the Uncle’s apron and said:

“Erm, I don’t know what you are talking about, but don’t make Asuta onii-chan so troubled, Papa.”

“No, it’s fine, Tara. Uncle... Thank you very much.”

“I didn’t say anything worthy of your thanks.”

Uncle Dora waved his hands bashfully and then put a hand on Tara’s head. Tara probably still didn’t understand what we were discussing, but she showed a satisfied smile.

The father-daughter pair warmed my heart. I told them about the attack yesterday while hiding some of the details. I added that someone who absolutely loathed the denizens of Forest’s Edge attacked us in broad daylight and expressed my wish for Uncle Dora to be more careful.

“Hmm, there would always be lawless individuals like that. We will be fine; you should be more careful, Asuta.”

I thanked him once again before leaving his stall.

And so, we opened the stall for today.

When we reached the northern zone of the marketplace, there were already 30-odd customers waiting there. With the departure of the ten “Silver Vase” members and the

eight staff of the architect company, I lost 18 regular patrons. However, the numbers of customers we got in the morning remained unchanged.

The “Myam-roasted meat” stall was handled by Lala Wu and me, while Leina Wu and Shela Wu tended to the “Kiba burger” stall. We made this arrangement as part of the plan for the Wu clan to completely take over the “Kiba burger” stall.

“By the way, Rii Sudora has worked here for almost half a month, correct? She only worked half as long as us, but her improvement is very fast.”

After the morning rush hour was over, we finally got to take a break, and Lala Wu told me that.

“To be honest, she is as good as Vena-nee and me. Maybe you should reconsider her wages.”

“That’s right. She takes over my place at the stall when I need to go to the inns, so I had never seen her work, and have completely forgotten about this.”

I had already increased the wages for Lala Wu and the others to 1.5 times their starting pay, so Rii Sudora’s initial pay of 3 red copper plates had to be increased to 4.5 red copper plates... I should round it up to 5 red copper plates.

“Speaking of which, didn’t you mention that you wanted the minor houses to have equal opportunities to earn money so you intended to rotate the staff very often?”

“Yes, my plan is to switch every twenty days or so; it’s about time to scout for new employees. Thank you, Lala Wu. I’m thinking about new dishes every day, and these things have slipped my mind.”

“You’re welcome.”

Lala Wu said with a shrug.

“By the way, Rimee threw a fit again last night. She said that it’s unfair that Leina-nee gets to help out in the stall too.”

I see. Leina Wu got to work here because of Vena Wu’s injury, so the Rimee Wu was the only one of the four sisters who didn’t get to help out here.

"Well, how should I explain this? Originally, I wanted Leina Wu and Rimee Wu to stay put until the situation with the city has stabilized. There shouldn't be any danger for Rimee Wu to come since there are guards with us, right?"

"Huh? You can discuss that with Mama Mia Lei. Having just the injured Vena-nee and Rimee at home will increase the workload of Mama Mia Lei and Grandma Ditto Min."

In that case, should I discuss things with Mama Mia Lei again?

"But Rimee Wu and Lala Wu will need to work on alternate days. Won't you mind that, Lala Wu?"

"I'm fine with working every other day. I like working at the stall, and if possible, I want to keep doing so."

Lala Wu showed her white teeth with a smile, which resembled her brother Ludo quite a lot.

At this moment, a burly westerner suddenly appeared before the stall.

"Welcome..." I stopped midway through my sentence. He wasn't a customer.

"Yo, your business is still as good as ever."

He had dark brown hair and beard, light brown eyes, and tanned skin. There was a yellowish bandana tied on his head, and he wore a sleeveless shirt and long pants. The middle-aged man had a face like a bandit boss; he was the man who disguised himself as the leader of a caravan as part of Kamyua Yost and Malfreed's plan—the "guardian" Zashuma.

"I have been waiting for you, Zashuma. I need to report something to you."

Kamyua Yost and Leito weren't in Genos, so this guy had taken over their duty of visiting the stall and checking if anything happened.

Just to be safe, three "guardians" were already lodging in the "Kimyusu's Tail Inn". But since Milano Mast already knew this guy, he took on this role.

"Hmm? Let's talk behind the wagon. Ah... Wait, it's suspicious to just walk away, come over here a short moment later."

Zashuma left immediately after saying that. He was probably planning to go into the woods after going some distance away from the stall. Before that incident with Geta, he and Kamyua Yost had always been wary of the stall being watched by others.

"That man is really suspicious. But it's understandable since he is a companion of that blonde uncle."

Lala Wu didn't seem to like Zashuma.

He took on the disguise of a caravan leader and was proficient in conning others, so he wasn't popular with the denizens of Forest's Edge.

I didn't feel that he and Kamyua Yost were similar at all. Zashuma didn't appear as suspicious as Kamyua Yost... but he didn't have the mysterious charm of Kamyua Yost either. In any case, he wasn't as weird as Kamyua Yost.

"I will be away for a bit; please tend to the stall in the meantime."

"Okay, be careful!"

Lala Wu waved at me, and I went around to the wagon behind us.

Shin Wu who was guarding the post there looked at me puzzledly.

"Kamyua Yost's companion is here; I'm going to inform him about what happened yesterday."

Shin Wu nodded and said, "Is that so." His face was still a little bruised after getting hit by Geta yesterday.

After playing with Gilulu and Lulu for about a minute, Zashuma was finally ushered in by a youth from the branch house.

"Asuta of the Fa house, this man is Kamyua Yost's companion, he said he had an appointment with you. Is that true?"

"Yes, that's right. Thank you for bringing him here."

The youth acknowledged me with his gaze and then left.

Zashuma laughed awkwardly as he watched the youth leave: "Ara ara."

"This guard sure is wary. And even a young Forest's Edge hunter like him is plenty intimidating. They have plenty of beauties, which is great too."

His tendency to joke wasn't well received by the denizens of Forest's Edge either.

Even though the denizens of Forest's Edge were rougher on the edges, there weren't bad people.

"So? What happened? Everything looks peaceful here."

For the third time, I explained what happened yesterday.

Zashuma stroked his sun-tanned cheeks and grunted in awe.

"The son of Red Beard Goram! The crucial character made his debut. However... the 'Northern Whirlwind' is seeking his mother. The son alone is not enough."

"Yes. And he absolutely hates the denizens of Forest's Edge."

"Fufu. He probably grew up listening to his mother telling him that his father was framed by despicable people. Ten years ago, her son was just three or four years old."

In that case he was younger than me or Shin Wu.

His age did match his height... But I was shocked by depth of grudge he was bearing at such a young age.

His yellow carnivorous eyes shining through his messy red hair were as intense as the hunters from Forest's Edge.

"Zashuma, if his mother is also hiding out in Genos, Kamyua will make an empty trip. Is there any way to inform Kamyua about this?"

"Well, if someone rides with the resolve to tire a Totos to death, they might catch up, but there's no point in doing so. The 'Northern Whirlwind' won't return without finding the mother. So let them continue their search there, while we continue our investigation here."

I see; that did make sense.

"But a Marsala hunter, huh... That would be a problem."

Shin Wu looked at Zashuma when he heard that.

His ever calm and narrow eyes had the gleam of a hunter.

"Westerner, permit me to interject. Do you know about the Marsala hunters?"

"Hmm? I'm not very sure since I had never seen one before... But Marsala is a mountain that is three days Totos ride away from Genos. It is said that the Barobaro bird hunted in Marsala is a great delicacy."

"Barobaro bird..."

"However, ferocious beasts known as Gaje leopards roam in the mountain of Marsala, so a half-assed hunter won't be able to hunt Barobaro bird. Only a Marsala hunter that can kill a Gaje leopard solo is recognized as a qualified hunter."

Which meant the yellowish brown hide worn by that youth was his hunter's garb.

Zashuma looked at the bruised Shin Wu and continued:

"Gaje leopard is about the size of a man. The ability to hunt such a beast at just 13 or 14 makes him a formidable opponent even for the hunters of Forest's Edge."

"Is that so. Thank you for sharing such a valuable information with me..."

Shin Wu acknowledged with a gaze, then shut his mouth.

Zashuma grunted, stroked his face, and turned towards me.

"Which means that the significant other of Red Beard Goram and her son have been

hiding around Marsala for the past decade. If that significant other is still there... a trip to Marsala will take three days so we might not have enough time."

The conference was in half a month.

The round trip would take six days, so they only had less than ten days to carry out their search... And there was no telling if Kamyua Yost's group would make any detours before heading into the Marsala mountain.

"What should we do then? No... Geta might appear before us, so I want to avoid fighting and explain what actually happened. Is there another way?"

"There's nothing more we can do. If we make his mother mad, the efforts by the 'Northern Whirlwind' will be all for naught. We have to resolve this as peacefully as possible. But... that kid got injured, right? It will be difficult if he gets taken in by the guards."

"It would be very troublesome. If that Count is as despicable as I thought and that kid's identity is uncovered, he will either get silenced forever or be used to ensure his mother's silence."

Zashuma said something dangerous as he shrugged his thick shoulders.

"But if that kid lives in an inn, I can track where he lives in no time. Marsala hunters aren't that common in Genos."

"Is that so..."

"Yes, my job is to drink at various bars and collect information. So there will finally be some tension in my work."

Zashuma smiled deviously.

"By the way, you are close with that vegetable seller, right? Ever since the felons from the Tsun clan got executed, I often run into him at inns."

"Huh? Vegetable seller, as in Uncle Dora?"

"I don't know his name; it's that man you buy vegetables from every morning."

That was definitely Uncle Dora.

“What’s wrong with Uncle Dora? Did you drag him into some dangerous incidents?”

“Ask him yourself. Anyway... That vegetable seller visited the inn every night and talked to others about the denizens of Forest's Edge. He said things like the denizens aren’t bad, the felons have been executed and the rest are innocent, and how thankful he was to the denizens of Forest's Edge and all that.”

“...”

“He even got into a squabble with people who detest the denizens of Forest's Edge but not to the extent of needing to call the guards. But... That man owns a farm to the south of the Post Station Town, correct? He didn’t need to eat dinner at an inn in the first place.”

I could only squeeze out the words: “...Is that so.”

I wondered how much help I was to Uncle Dora and Milano Mast.

I had to suppress the warm feeling in my heart to avoid letting Zashuma notice.

3

I returned to the stall after finishing my report to Zashuma and saw two familiar girls glaring at each other with “Kiba burgers” in their hands.

Lala Wu who was tending to the stall looked back at me with a bored face.

“You are finally back. Asuta, do something about them.”

And of course, they were Dell and Yumi.

Dell was the daughter of a steel merchant visiting Genos recently, while Yumi was the daughter of the “West Wind Inn”. The former was a short-haired girl dressed like a boy, while the latter was a sexy girl wearing a very revealing attire, similar to the clothes worn by the women of Forest's Edge.

I was puzzled about why the two of them who had put their differences behind them seemed so tense.

“Erm, what’s going on here...?”

When I spoke, the two of them turned towards me as one.

“Oh, Asuta. It’s nothing... We aren’t noisy or troubling Asuta, right?”

“Fufu, then go back to the city. A fierce-looking girl like you wandering the streets will definitely trouble others.”

“You have a malicious face too, so hurry on home then!”

“I still have business with Asuta.”

“I also have business with Asuta.”

They were really loud.

And the air about them seemed to be electric, and I could almost hear the ‘bachi bachi’ sound.

By the way, the young escort Lavis who was standing beside Dell was glaring at Ludo Wu with guarded eyes, which made the atmosphere even more treacherous. Ludo Wu was pretending not to notice, but I could understand why Lala Wu was feeling so dull.

“A-Anyway, let’s move to the side first... So, what’s the matter? Didn’t you two made up yesterday?”

“Who knows. I just wanted to talk about the dishes I ate at the ‘Big Tree of the South Inn’, and she showed up all of a sudden.”

“Hmmp! I wouldn’t be so angry if you didn’t keep flaunting about it. I... also want to eat Asuta’s meat.”

Dell looked depressed, while Yumi flicked her long hair and said: “I can’t even!”

“That’s not what I mean. I was just too excited after having a delicious meal... Sorry if I made you mad.”

“No, my fuse is just too short... I’m just too envious. I’m sorry too.”

So that was what happened, I felt relief.

The two who were glaring at each other seconds ago were looking at each other bashfully before turning towards me with a smile.

“That’s the thing, Asuta’s cooking is too delicious! B-Brazzers? Is that how you say it? It’s super delicious!”

“I-Is that so. I’m glad to hear you saying that.”

“How nice. It’s a dish made with Tau sauce, right? I also want to try it.”

Dell voiced her desires as a child. The so-called brazzers was actually braised meat, a dish seasoned with Tau sauce that originated in her hometown in Jaguar.

Yumi looked at Dell’s slender waist with a wry smile.

“Give it a try then; you can’t come out of the city at night, right?”

“Yes. My father says that it’s too dangerous after dusk, and takes away my entry pass. And the drawbridge is raised at night. Erm... Asuta, can I eat your cooking in the daytime?”

“Well, I will only prepare the dishes in the afternoon. But you don’t need to wait until evening; the innkeeper will probably sell you a portion if you ask him.”

“That’s right! Then I can eat it if I don’t have work!”

Dell recovered her energy and smiled. Yumi also smiled in relief.

The small, young, and boyish Dell and the sexy Yumi, they were polar opposites but their smiles were equally charming.

“But this is the last day you are cooking that braised meat, correct? The innkeeper says

you will be changing the menu today.”

“Yes, that’s right. Today’s menu is vegetable stew. I will be doing a taste test for the meat dish today. If it is accepted, I will be making that meat dish tomorrow.”

“Really!? Then I will try it later! Uwah, I’m looking forward to it!”

“Tch! That’s too sly!”

“Ahaha. Sorry, sorry.”

Yumi patted Dell’s head.

I was a bit worried about her getting mad about being treated like a child, but Dell merely puffed her cheeks unhappily. This duo was sure interesting.

“What about you? Don’t you have business to discuss?”

“Oh, right! I want to show Asuta something!”

Dell said energetically as she pulled out a knife from her waist. Today, it wasn’t a dagger for self-defense, but something else.

It looked like a cooking tool kept inside a sheath. Unlike my Santoku knife, the hilt of this knife was also steel. There were grooves on it, probably to give it more grip.

“Oh, is that the kitchen knife sold in your shop, Dell?”

“Yes! This is a meat cutting knife! Its selling point is the easiness of cutting through the kimyusu bones with it!”

Dell handed it to me hilt first, and I took it curiously.

“Erm, can I draw it out?”

“You can’t tell if it’s good unless you do it, correct?”

Of course I couldn’t. So I pulled it out of its sheath.

The blade of the body was a beautiful white steel. The shape was like a butcher knife or a western kitchen knife and narrower than the Santoku knife.

The blade was about 20 cm long and, despite being narrow, the edge was thicker than my other knives. The hilt was from steel but wasn't too heavy. Its handling felt similar to the Santoku knife when I used it.

"Hmm, this is a good knife."

It was heavier than a Santoku knife and lighter than a hunter's knife. The steel handle had a surprisingly good grip, and the entire knife was very well balanced.

"How is it? Want to try cutting with it?"

There was no reason for me to turn her down.

I wanted a meat cutting knife in order to take better care of the Santoku knife, which my father had poured his heart and soul into. I had already gotten permission from Ai Fa.

However, the knives sold in the Post Station Town didn't intrigue me at all. My expectation became probably higher after purchasing the high-quality vegetable cutting knife from Shumimaru.

I took out the bundle of meat I was planning to let Neil taste test and opened it on the stall counter. Inside was belly meat covered in Pico leaves. I pushed the tip of the knife into the soft meat and cut a few slices off. All the meat slices were exactly 7 mm thick.

I kept mincing the meat and made a patty a short moment later.

It was impeccable. It was as good as my father's Santoku knife in cutting meat.

"Yes, this is excellent. I can't find anything wrong with its handling."

"Really? Then you will buy it!?"

Dell leaned forward with her eyes filled with expectations.

"Yes, but you are selling this in the city, correct? Which means, it is very expensive?"

“Of course, it will be more expensive than the knives in the Post Station Town, but I guarantee it is worth every coin! The price is twelve white copper plates!”

Twelve white copper plates.

The Semu-made kitchen knife I bought from Shumimaru cost 18 white copper plates. The knives sold in the Post Station Town were basically priced between four to five white copper plates, and the hunting dagger Ai Fa was lending me cost six white copper plates.

Twelve white copper plates were roughly ten kiba worth of tusks and horns. It wasn't cheap at all, but I didn't want to continue exerting the Santoku knife that had been in use for over twenty years.

“Okay, I have decided. Dell, I want to buy this knife.”

“That's great! Thank you for your patronage!”



Dell showed an incredibly cheery smile.

Yumi and I both grinned at the sight of her innocent smile.

“Indeed I’m looking for a good meat cutting knife, but why are you selling me one all of a sudden?”

“Huh? Because Asuta had never used a Jaguar blade before, so I’m not happy about that! I can see that vegetable knife is Semu-made, and the other one isn’t from Jaguar either.”

Dell inspected the Santoku knife on the platform seriously.

“This is a good knife; I don’t know where it is made, but it still surprised me. Like I said... In order to not lose to that knife, I chose one of the best from my stock!”

“Really? That makes me glad, thank you. But... Shouldn’t you sell this excellent knife of yours to a noble?”

“Hmmp! I think Asuta is better than the chef hired by the nobles! I just want the best chef to use the best knife.”

Dell said with a fearless smile.

All her smiles were charming and showed her emotions without any filter. I thought it was funny that she had an annoying smirk when I first met her.

“See you later then! I will come again tomorrow!”

“I need to get back to work too. Asuta, I’m looking forward to the dinner at the inn tonight!”

Dell and Yumi left some warmth in my heart and then headed to the north and south respectively.

The moment they left, the easterner with a western air about him, Sangjura, came quietly to the stall.

“Asuta, give me one.”

“Ah, hello, thank you for your patronage. Erm... Thank you very much for yesterday.”

“No need for thanks, this is my duty as a westerner.”

Sangjura smiled and pulled back his hood to show his long brown hair.

As my heart was being soothed by his smile... Sangjura said something incredible to me.

“The bandit kid, caught. Peace upheld, is great.”

“What!”

I stood there stiffly and felt the blood slowly flowing away from my face.

“W-Wait! That kid from yesterday got apprehended by the guards?”

“Isn’t that so? I no see wanted notice, so I thought he is caught.”

“Wanted notice...?”

“Yes. When a suspect is wanted, the guards will put up wanted notice with sketches of the suspect on them. But I go there, no see. So... I thought he got caught.”

Sangjura tilted his head in surprise.

I exhaled the breath I was holding in.

“I see. Ah, that scared me... No, sorry. Actually, we didn’t report him to the guards.”

“You no tell guards?”

It was Sangjura’s turn to widen his eyes in surprise. His expression wasn’t that exaggerated, but it felt more incredulous because he looked like a Semu.

But now wasn’t the time to think about that.

“If others are violent to you, you must tell guards. If leave criminals be, others will be

harmed."

"Yes, it is the duty of a westerner to report such incidents. However... he is only targeting the denizens of Forest's Edge, so there shouldn't be any danger to the townsfolk"

"Then it is more danger to Asuta you all."

"We will be fine. We have dependable companions to protect us."

Sangjura looked at Ludo Wu who was standing guard by the stall with his light colored eyes.

Compared to that time when Ludo Wu was facing off against Lavis, Ludo Wu stared back at Sangjura with much more serious eyes.

"But... I think you should tell guards. Or, you have concerns?"

"Concerns?"

"Yes. I heard status of denizens of Forest's Edge in Post Station Town, complicated. I seldom come Genos, so no know well. But denizens of Forest's Edge is ostracized?"

Sangjura leaned forth with a sincere expression and said:

"But denizens of Forest's Edge, citizen of west god Selva. My mother, Semu, but I also citizen of Selva. Westerners all brethrens. Don't need to be concern. I think you should find guards."

It wasn't that sort of concern.

However, we couldn't approach the guards working under Pyschkurewuss' brother for this case... and I couldn't tell Sangjura who was just passing by all these complicated matters.

"...Still have other concern?"

"Yes, I'm very sorry..."

"Then need me go in your place? I also involve in this incident, so can inform guards."

“N-No need! Doing that will just cause us problems.”

It would be hard to hide everything.

I scrambled to formulate my words.

“Erm, he has a deep grudge targeted specifically towards the denizens of Forest's Edge. So we want to have a proper conversation with him to resolve his misunderstanding. If he gets apprehended before that, we won't get the chance to resolve his misunderstanding... That's why we didn't inform the guards.”

On second thought, the only person I had to keep in the dark was Pyschkurewuss.

Zattsu Tsun's group committing the crime a decade ago, and the “Red Beard Gang” being made their scapegoat was already public knowledge, so there wasn't any need to hide this. Or rather, we should let more people know about this.

However, I didn't want to disclose Geta's identity as words might spread to Pyschkurewuss' ears.

Geta declared himself to be a son of Red Beard Goram in front of Sangjura, but Sangjura didn't show any reaction to this name. Sangjura who wasn't from Genos might not know about the “Red Beard Gang”.

Anyway, Sangjura didn't pursue the matter and backed away with eyes that looked a little saddened.

“Is that so. You seem to have your reasons. Sorry for saying too much.”

“It's fine, no need to apologize. Your concern makes me glad, Sangjura.”

“May peace be with Asuta and everyone. I hope you clear up misunderstanding.”

Sangjura finally left with a gentle smile and a “Myam-roasted meat” in hand.

“Hmm, that guy got some skills. But I don't think I will lose to him unless his right arm heals up.”

Ludo Wu muttered as he watched that tall and slender figure disappear into the crowd.

"Don't say that. He helped us yesterday, so he is our benefactor instead."

"I know that. But having an opponent that I know I couldn't best wandering around makes me uneasy. It's fine if he is a denizen of Forest's Edge, but him being a townsfolk is..."

So that was how a hunter of Forest's Edge felt.

By the way, Ai Fa was still wary of Sangjura.

If we can build a cordial relationship with Genos, will she be less wary?

Would the day when the denizens of Forest's Edge treat westerners as brethrens ever come... Would the day when westerners think of the denizens of Forest's Edge as fellow citizens ever happen?

As I was thinking about all that, the sun finally rose to the middle of the sky.

Chapter 2

A day in Asuta's life, 1st of the White Month (2)

1

Afternoon.

During this time, I would let Shela Wu and the others handle the business at the stalls, and head to the inns to cater food for them.

I had to bring a cooking assistant along, so I hired Rii Sudora to tend to the stall in the afternoon. And as Leina Wu mentioned in the morning, the Lutim and Lei houses each sent two young hunters to the town so Ludo Wu and the three other escorts could accompany me to the inn.

And of course, my assistant was Leina Wu. She was envious of Shela Wu who would be managing the stalls, but she still felt that assisting me with my work at the inn was a worthwhile job.

The first inn we visited was the “Cryptic Venerable Inn” where the easterners often lodged in. Ludo Wu usually followed me into the kitchen, but Shin Wu took his place today, and the rest kept watch on the outside of the inn.

“Listen up, if that red-haired brat shows up, don’t rush at him alone. Blow your grass whistle and call for backup.”

The eyes of Ludo Wu who was giving the instructions seemed to be anticipating something. He seemed very curious about how capable the Marsala hunter who fended off Shin Wu was.

After bidding them farewell, we entered the “Cryptic Venerable Inn”.

“Neil, I brought the kiba I promised.”

I opened the bundle of kiba inside the kitchen, and Neil’s eyes lit up happily. Neil had

finally decided to buy fresh kiba meat, so I quickly brought him a sample.

“Thank you very much, is this portion for sampling?”

“Yes. Different parts of the kiba have different texture, so I plan to set the price depending on the parts.”

I explained as I opened the bundle.

“But having less quantity doesn’t mean the quality is better. Each part has its own tastiness which doesn’t depend on the price, so I hope you can confirm it for yourself.”

“I see. Normally, the meat from the karon’s body is more tender and delicious than the karon’s legs. I would very much like to know.”

Neil looked at the meat on the counter seriously.

I brought 200 g of meat from four different parts today. They were the shoulder meat, loin meat, abdomen meat, and thigh meat. The lean loin and shoulder meat were limited in quantity and expensive, so I didn’t bring them along today.

“The kiba hind legs have the most meat, so I plan to benchmark it to the karon thigh meat. I will then use this benchmark to decide the price of their other meat.”

Neil wanted to buy ten portions of meat for dinner, which was about 2.5 kg.

So, the price was...

Thigh meat, 9 red copper plates.

Shoulder meat, 11.5 red copper plates.

Loin meat, 14 red copper plates.

Abdomen meat, 16.5 red copper plates.

“The taste from grilling and boiling it is very different, so please test them out. And of course, you can also buy a mixture of 5 thigh meat and 5 shoulder meat.”

“Thank you very much. By the way, which parts are suitable for grilling, and which parts will be good for stew?”

“Personally speaking, I find the thigh meat and shoulder meat a little tougher, so they are more suited for a vegetable stew. But if you knock the meat with bottles or sticks to break its fibers, cut the muscles and slice it thinly, the texture will become more tender.”

“I see, that’s worth a try.”

Neil said as he squinted his eyes happily.

Kamyua Yost once said that the dishes served in inns were just an extension of home cooking. But there were innkeepers like Neil and Naudiz from the “Big Tree of the South Inn” who put a lot of effort into their cooking.

They must have had a strong urge to let the easterners and southerners who traveled all the way to Genos to have a satisfying meal. Thanks to them, I could procure exotic seasonings at a slightly higher price, and a dubious character like me was permitted to sell my cookings in their inns.

“I will start doing my work for today then.”

With the help of Leina Wu, we started making 30 portions of “Kiba sauté- Arrabbiata style”.

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After finishing the work in the “Cryptic Venerable Inn” in less than an hour, we went to the “Big Tree of the South Inn”.

This time yesterday, we were attacked by Geta while walking down this road, but we reached the “Big Tree of the South Inn” without incident today.

“Oh, I have been waiting for you, Asuta.”

The innkeeper Naudiz welcomed us with a smile.

However, when I asked for his permission for the hunter’s of Forest’s Edge to guard

the inn's entrance, his face turned gloomy:

"Something troubling happened again? Are the talks between you and the city people that complicated?"

After already having explained the incident to Milano Mast, Uncle Dora, Zashuma, Sangjura and Neil, I had to convey yesterday's conflict for the sixth time.

Not only was our relationship with the city people strained; we were even attacked by someone with a hatred towards the denizens of Forest's Edge. That was why we wanted to increase the security in view of the danger. Naudiz's face turned gloomier as he listened:

"Hmm... This sounds really complicated..."

Naudiz was different from Neil; I thought he was neutral towards the denizens of Forest's Edge. He neither loathed nor supported the denizens of Forest's Edge, but I could tell that he respected the denizens as important business partners.

So telling him too much might make him reconsider the pros and cons of working together with us... At least, he wasn't asking us to get lost for the day.

Naudiz said: "I was thinking about that commotion two days ago, and how the people in the city didn't tell us anything. The denizens of Forest's Edge and the city both made mistakes, so all involved parties should work towards avoiding the same thing from happening again... If they announced that, the people in the Post Station Town would feel more at ease."

"It seemed that the truth has been uncovered, yet the feeling that some parts remained concealed lingers in my heart. I think that... it's impossible for the people in the city to bring up their shame and failures."

These words were often used to describe the miserable state of the relationship between the Genos city and the Post Station Town.

It had been one and a half months since I first stepped foot in the Post Station Town... and I had not heard the townsfolk of the Post Station Town say anything positive about the Genos city or the guards. The future ruler, Malfreed, was probably worried about this situation and wanted to resolve this.

“Leaving that aside, I’m looking forward to trying your new dish today.”

“Well, I will start working on it.”

The menu of the “Big Tree of the South Inn” was to change today.

Vegetable stew would be served today. Its name? “Kiba soup seasoned with Tau sauce” might do. Actually, this was the kiba hotpot I tried making for dinner in the Fa house.

Meat from three different parts of the kiba, namely, the thigh, shoulder, and belly, and four types of vegetables, which were aria, tino, chachi, and gigo, were used. After cooking them thoroughly, I seasoned it with rock salt and Tau sauce. Taking inspiration from kenchin soup, I made this latest version of kiba soup.

There was a large variety of ingredients, but I reduced the amount of each of them to minimize the cost. The efficiency ratio was 23% without the meat, and 60% if the meat was included. Since the braised kiba used a large amount of Tau sauce and fruit wine, the efficiency ratio of that dish was actually 5% higher.

However, this was different from the normal stew, as the lilo had been added when cooking the meat to mask its gamey taste. To be frank, there wouldn’t be any stench after the kiba was bloodlet. But the strong taste of the kiba, compared to kimyusu and karon meat, might not be acceptable to many people, so I included this extra step.

The selling point of this dish was the potato-like chachi and herb-like gigo. The chachi was boiled, while gigo was added after all the vegetables were cooked. This way, the customers could taste two types of vegetables.

“Alright. After I scoop up the foam, can you help me maintain a weak fire?”

“Yes, leave it to me.”

Leina Wu smiled brightly. Leina Wu’s skill in cooking vegetable stew was as good as mine so I could leave it to her without any worries.

By the way, for the vegetable stew, Ai Fa didn’t tell me specifically that “Asuta’s cooking tastes better.” In the end, her comment was “I can only say that both sides are even...”

Anyway, after entrusting the task to Leina Wu, I started making today's sample dish. I hoped that Naudiz who was happy with the "Kiba soup" won't need to worry about removing the "Braised kiba" from his menu. I intended to present the new dish that was supposed to replace the "Braised kiba" today.

"Have you named the dish yet?"

"Yes. I dub it 'Meat chachi'."

Naudiz widened his eyes in surprise.

"Instead of kiba chachi, you are calling it 'Meat chachi'? Why the name?"

"Hahaha, that's what this dish is called in my hometown. And I'm selling a dish called 'Kiba Chitto' in the 'Cryptic Venerable Inn', so I want to differentiate them a little."

However, chachi didn't exist in my old world, only potatoes which had a similar taste to chachi. So this dish was equivalent to 'Meat and potato stew' in my old world.

I made this dish plenty of times in the Tsurumi restaurant too.

Depending on the environment, the ingredients that would be used might change. Ingredient-wise, chachi and aria could replace potato and onions, but I didn't have any soy sauce, sugar or mirin, so I had to use the Tau sauce, which resembled soy sauce, and fruit wine that was similar to red wine. The fruit wine was much sweeter than red wine, so I made the decision to cook "Meat chachi" and braised kiba.

Leaving the ingredients aside for now, I need to settle the issue of seasoning first.

I thought as I poured some kiba oil into the pot to fry the belly meat.

I tossed in aria and chachi before the belly meat started to brown, and, after stir-frying them for a while, I added in Tau sauce, fruit wine, and water.

"...Asuta, all that's left is waiting, right?"

Leina asked me energetically as she asked about my work process.

"Yes."

When she heard my answer, she replied: "This dish is really simple."

"Yes, it's easy to make. But the ratio of Tau sauce and fruit wine, cooking time and the intensity of the fire, all these will change the taste a lot."

There weren't any measuring cups and gas stove in this world. Without the instrument for accurate measurements, the instinct during cooking was very important.

"In my hometown, this is the representative dish of home cooking. But surprisingly, it is harder to teach this dish, compared to hamburg steak and braised meat."

Leina Wu said with curious eyes: "Is that so?"

"Ah, the Tau sauce and fruit wine are really fragrant."

Naudiz leaned his nose in.

"I also add fruit wine into my cooking, but I'm not as bold as Asuta. The sweetness of the fruit wine really suits the taste of southerners."

"I heard there is sugar in Jaguar?"

I remembered Arudas saying that.

"It should be available in Genos too. But I have never seen it sold outside the rock walls."

"Is it so rare that it's only sold in the city? Hmm, the seasonings in this Post Station Town are really lacking. It's the same with Tau sauce; you can't buy any unless you have connections with the southern merchants, right? Aside from rock salt, what other seasonings are sold in the market?"

"I have to admit there aren't any other seasonings. Some people use herbs like myam for seasoning though."

I added firewood to the stove, nodded, and replied: "I see."

"By the way, no one seemed to be selling Pico leaves and lilo. I only see them in the

rock salt shop from time to time.”

“Around these parts, Pico leaves and lilo can only be foraged in the Morga forest. Having the freedom to forage as much Pico leaves and lilo as they wish can be considered one of the few privileges of the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

Naudiz chose his words carefully to avoid saying anything sarcastic or unpleasant. He must have put in a lot of effort in order to not give any special treatment to the denizens of Forest's Edge.

“So preserving meat in the Post Station Town can only be done by marinating it with salt, correct?”

“That's right. It's a chore to procure fresh meat every day, and the price will be high if I don't buy in bulk. I will normally buy enough for several days, and preserve the rest with salt.”

“I see.”

If things went well, I could teach Milano Mast to cook with kimyusu and karon meat. I wondered if I could make an acceptable dish with something other than kiba. This was a stimulating challenge for me.

“Ah, excuse me for a moment.”

It was almost time and I removed the cover of the pot.

The steam gushed out along with the fragrance of the Tau sauce and fruit wine. The water submerging the ingredients had been reduced by half. I used the spatula to stir the ingredients and then used a krilee stick to poke a chachi.

The vegetable got penetrated without any resistance.

How about the taste?

I used the stick to tear off some chachi and then put it together with some belly meat into my mouth.

It was soft with a faint taste of sweetness. The chachi was piping hot and smooth.

When I chewed, the sweet delicious taste spread in my mouth.

The sweetness is a little diluted so a thicker texture will be more ideal.

I poured Tau sauce onto the spoon until it was half full, scooped up stock from the plate, and poured it into the pot.

I carefully stirred to avoid mashing the chachi, waited for the stock to boil, and then tasted it.

It felt great. Like braised kiba, this dish tasted best when cooled, which allowed the flavor to permeate it. But the taste right now was already good enough right now.

I scooped up the content of the pot onto a new plate.

“Please have a try; this is half a portion.”

It had around 120 g of meat, half an aria, and a quarter chachi.

I thought about adding more chachi, but in order to keep the cost on the same level as “Braised kiba”, this was the limit. Chachi cost 2.5 times more than aria.

Compared to the cheap aria and poitan, they seem so expensive.

I pondered as I poured half a portion into another plate.

“Leina Wu, I will watch the fire for you, please try it too.”

“Ah, can I?”

Leina Wu was as happy as a child.

Naudiz had a smile as brilliant as Leina Wu.

And so, the two of them picked up a spoon and sent the dish into their mouths, and then exploded in happiness at the same time.

“Asuta, this is amazing!”

“Yes, this is just marvelous!”

Naudiz was smiling so much that the corners of his eyes and brows were drooping.

“Ah, it tastes really good. The soft chachi is great, and the sweet aria was a nice touch too. But the kiba is delicious as well... Compared to the braised meat, this dish brings out the taste of the vegetables more.”

“Thank you for your compliment. But unlike braised meat and the vegetable stew, this dish didn’t use any lilo. The kiba taste will be stronger, so I’m not sure if this will be to the liking of the southerners.”

“You don’t need to worry about that. Or rather, I think you don’t need to add lilo into the kiba soup too. The lilo is too strong, and just a little of it will affect the taste of the Tau sauce.”

That was an astute observation.

If the lilo meshed well with the “Kiba soup”, I would have added it in back at home. I only used it to mask the gamey taste.

Naudiz tilted his head with a smile: “I don’t think the kiba tastes too gamey anyway. I believe it’s strange for any customers to dislike this taste.”

His movements were full of charm for a middle-aged bearded man.

“Or maybe they think kiba isn’t something normal people should eat? The texture of the kiba might be very different from karon and kimyusu, and the taste is also stronger, so that’s why some people might dislike it.”

Pops Balan was also misled by this when he tried the “Kiba burger”, and concluded that it ‘tastes bad’.

But a month later, he brought a large quantity of kiba jerky instead of karon jerky. Pops told me that he had gotten used to the strong flavor after eating it for a month.



"Asuta has worked at the stall for more than a month, right? Word that kiba is edible had already spread in the Post Station Town. The kiba's taste is what makes it delicious, so there is no need to mask it at all."

"I see. Your words... give me confidence."

I smiled in reply to Naudiz.

"Would you like to buy this dish?"

"Of course! Ah... But it's hard for me to give up on 'Braised kiba'. Once every five, no, ten days will be fine, is that possible...?"

"I'm fine with that arrangement. Then I will prepare 'Braised kiba' on the first day of the ten-day contract, then alternate between 'Meat chachi' and 'Kiba soup' after that. What do you think?"

Naudiz wasn't just worried about his customers; he also wanted to eat 'Braised kiba' himself. Unlike Neil, Naudiz ate the cooking he brought from me as his dinner. The fact that he was willing to forgo the profits of one portion in order to eat it made me proud.

Anyway, the reason I intended to remove the 'Braised kiba' from the menu was the cooking time. So I should be able to cope if it was just once every ten days. If I really couldn't find the time, I would have to leave the stall early for that day.

Ah, but I can't increase the number of guards in the morning in such a situation... I would really prefer to not need guards when visiting the inns.

As I was thinking about all that, Naudiz said to me with a thoughtful face:

"By the way... Asuta, you mentioned that you will be taking a day off after finishing this ten-day contract?"

"That's right. So I hope the future contract will start after my off days."

"I don't mind, but... are you going to rest for the 7th and the 8th?"

"Yes, I'm thinking of studying my cooking too."

Naudiz lowered his head and said: "I see..."

At this moment, Leina Wu shared a small portion of her 'Meat chachi' with Shin Wu.

After stealing a peek at Shin Wu squinting his eyes happily after taking a bite, I turned to Naudiz again.

"What? Is there a problem?"

"It's nothing. But I have to do something about this."

Naudiz then lifted his head and said:

"Asuta, you mentioned that you are willing to sell fresh kiba for me to cook myself. Does that still apply?"

"Huh? Yes, it does."

"Then... I want to buy kiba."

I couldn't help asking: "But why?"

Naudiz wasn't too enthusiastic about this proposal before.

"For the sake of business, of course. If I can't sell Asuta's cooking for these two days, my customers might eat at some other inn instead."

"Y-You are overthinking it, correct? I won't be catering meals at all during my day offs, so they can't eat my food no matter where they go."

"But, Asuta, you sold kiba to the innkeeper of the 'Cryptic Venerable Inn', right? And you are planning to cater for the 'West Wind Inn' and 'Kimyusu's Tail Inn' too. In that case... these inns might come up with their own kiba dishes. That frightens me a little."

"Hmm..."

"I don't think the other innkeepers are as good at cooking as Asuta. But patron's craving for kiba can only be satisfied by it, correct? At least that's what I think when considering things from the perspective of the customers."

Naudiz then bowed deeply:

"Please sell me fresh kiba meat. I want to use the next few days to research a presentable dish together with my significant other"

And, of course, I lowered my head and answered: "Thank you very much."

My original goal was to make kiba itself the merchandise, not the kiba cooking. I was overjoyed that Naudiz made this decision right after Neil did.

Anyway, we didn't encounter the red-haired Geta or any ploy from Pyschkurewuss today and finished our work in the Post Station Town without incident. Two-thirds of the meaningful first day of the White month was now over.

2

It was between noon and dusk and felt like 3.30pm to me.

After completing all my work, we set off from the Post Station Town for the Forest's Edge settlement.

The great thing was, despite losing the regular patrons from the "Silver Vase" and architects, sales didn't drop significantly. 143 portions were sold today, and we would have been sold out if Shumimaru and Pops were still here.

Although some people had left Genos, others had come to visit. And their numbers were roughly equal to my stall's customers who had left.

Anyway, the work for today had concluded smoothly. We parted ways with the young hunters from Lutim and Lei houses on the road back to the Forest's Edge settlement, and I picked up Gilulu's reins. The unfortunate thing was, my wagon became full after Rii Sudora and the youths from the Wu clan branch house got on.

And there was a pile of ingredients and crockery like pots too, so I didn't push Gilulu too hard and let it walk slowly. The road was full of sharp turns in the first place, so Gilulu's burden was even heavier.

Despite all that, Gilulu towed the wagon energetically with a dumb face as usual. Even at this slower pace, it took less than 30 minutes to arrive at the Wu clan village.

After reaching the Wu clan village, I gave a few suggestions to Leina Wu on making the patty for the “Kiba burger” and then headed home. Unlike yesterday, I was escorted by Ludo Wu and Shin Wu on their mount, Lulu. When Ai Fa wasn’t accompanying me, they would escort me back to the Forest’s Edge settlement.

Both Geta and Pyschkurewuss’ henchmen probably wouldn’t venture into the Forest’s Edge settlement... But Donda Wu planned to play all the cards he has on hand. I was grateful for his consideration and hoped peaceful days would come quickly.

“Ah, Asuta, we have been waiting.”

When I reached home, there were six women waiting for me.

The Fou, Lan, and Dean houses sent two women each to learn cooking. I didn’t see Celice Lan Fou, but Tulu Dean and Jass Dean were here.

“Asuta, long time no see.”

Jass Dean, the elder sister of the Dean house head and a middle-aged woman with serious eyes, lowered her head quietly.

The ten-year-old Tulu Dean who was adopted from the Tsun clan by the Dean house lowered her head timidly too.

We had already put our differences behind us when Tulu Dean and I tried making offal dishes. But that was quite some time ago, so she had turned introverted again. My only option was to spend some time to warm up to her, so I smiled:

“The lesson today will be on making hamburg meat patty. Let’s work hard together, Tulu Dean?”

“Ah, y-yes...”

Tulu Dean lowered her head.

But her eyes weren’t gloomy anymore, and she looked up at me.

“I heard that it goes against the customs of Forest's Edge to grill meat in someone else's kitchen. Is it fine to do the preparation work before the grilling here?”

“That's fine. We have brought the necessary ingredients with that in mind.”

The Lan house women replied.

The Lan, Fou, and Dean houses all paired a young girl with an elderly woman. Including Rii Sudora and me, there were eight of us here.

“I will patrol the area before Ai Fa comes back.”

After thanking Ludo Wu, I went into my home together with the women.

“First, cook the poitan thoroughly to make it more sticky. If you don't have enough time, you can add in diced gigo as a workaround, but that would cost money. So... we can cook this much poitan in no time. While we are cooking the poitan, let's dice the aria first.”

There were more than two hours till sunset. I had already decided to do the slicing of the meat, which was needed for the stall, in the morning so I was free during this time.

So I taught them how to fry the diced aria with fruit wine and mince the meat while watching the fire. After teaching them that, I could work on my own studies.

My homework right now was to taste the vegetables I seldom came into contact with.

Be it the House Lutim wedding or the business in the Post Station Town, the first task I would take on was testing the taste of the new ingredients. That's why I tried the taste of aria, poitan, tino, pula, tarapa, chachi, gigo, myam, and other ingredients. The variety sold in the Post Station Town was much larger than those bought by the denizens of Forest's Edge.

There were some vegetables which I wasn't sure of their use. Like poitan that confounded me in the past, I couldn't find the connection between some of the vegetables with the food I was familiar with.

Some vegetables weren't suitable for selling. They might have limited harvest, making

it hard to procure the required quantity.

After excluding these vegetables, there wasn't much variety left.

Hmm... I'm not that free today, so let's get this over with.

I thought as I reached for a durian-like fruit that was orange and spiky.

It was about the size of a grapefruit and had the shape of a rugby ball. One of it cost 0.5 red copper plates, which was the same price as a chachi despite being heavier, which made it a suitable candidate.

It seemed to be called shiru. It was sold in many stalls in the Post Station Town but seldom bought by the denizens of Forest's Edge.

The spiky husk was hard, so I used the meat cutting knife I bought today to try opening it. This knife was actually suitable for cutting any ingredients, just like the Santoku knife. The knife recommended by Dell met my expectations perfectly and broke through the husk of the shiru.

The sweet and sour fragrance of the fruit permeated the room.

The inside was yellow.

There were clusters of juicy gem-like seeds in there, much like a pomegranate. I scraped them onto a plate, and the yellowish juice dripped on top of it, and the fragrance in the room became even stronger.

“...What a sweet smell.”

Tulu Dean who was mincing meat looked back at me shyly.

The children in this world were sensitive to sweet fragrance too.

“This is shiru, which is seldom seen in the Forest's Edge settlement. Want to try some?”

“Huh, can I?”

I grunted positively and scooped up some fruit juice with a spoon.

Tulu Dean whose hands were dirty because of the meat she was mincing looked at me troublingly, so I shoved the spoon right to her mouth and said: "Here."

Tulu Dean's face blushed as she drank from the spoon.

She suddenly shouted from her cute lips: "So sour!"

"Hmm. That's probably why the denizens of Forest's Edge don't really eat this."

It smelled like oranges, but shiru was as sour as a lemon. It was sweeter than a lemon, but at the same time, more sour than one.

Tulu Dean made angry tsundere noises as she waved her hands. She probably didn't want to touch others with her dirty palms, so she kept hitting me with her elbow.

"Sorry about that. But if you drink it after diluting with some water, it should be quite tasty, right?"

"It's not tasty! My mouth hurts!"

She yelled while turning her face away.

Jass Dean looked happily at Tulu Dean who was behaving in a way that befitted her age. The women from the Fou house and Lan house were also snickering.

"Asuta, is this fine?"

Rii Sudora pointed at the counter with a gleeful smile.

There was a nice pile of pink minced meat over there.

"Yes, that will do. Next will be mixing it with the diced aria, poitan, and stock. Ah, it will taste better if you add some salt and Pico leaves; I will share some of the Fa house's salt and Pico leaves with you for today."

After that, the other women also finished mincing their meat. The denizens of Forest's Edge were strong so they could finish the manual labor of mincing meat as quickly as me.

We might be able to finish ahead of time. I moved the plate of shiru juice to a corner of the room and decided to teach them how to make meat patty.

“By having a strong fire in one stove and a weak flame in another stove, it is possible to grill large meat patties. But it is difficult to control the intensity of the fire, so let’s start with the weak one. Take this much meat, meld it into a ball, and then toss it left and right to push out the air inside.”

I played catch with the meat patty between my left and right hands. This is a test of how nimble one’s hands were. Tulu Dean and Rii Sudora were quick on their hands, a reflection on their skills in cooking.

The women from the Fou and Lan houses grumbled “This is difficult” as they tried doing so happily. They seemed sincerely happy that they could finally challenge the complicated process of cooking hamburg steaks.

“...Oh right, I have something to discuss with the Fou and Lan houses.”

I recalled my conversation with Lala Wu this morning about the job rostering for the work in the Post Station Town.

I told the four of them about how the wealth should be distributed equally and whether anyone wanted to take the job in the Post Station Town in place of the Sudora house.

But their response was lukewarm.

“Work in the Post Station Town, huh... We have been in the Fa house’s care in all sorts of ways so we would like to repay your kindness.”

An elderly woman answered.

She had a serious face.

“Just tell us what you need us to do, and we will get it done.”

Lala Wu and Leina Wu’s smiling face came to my mind, and I said: “Ah, no, I’m not asking you to repay me in the form of work. I just hope you can enjoy work that is

different from your usual routine.”

But their expressions remained unchanged.

Rii Sudora said calmly: “Asuta, are you short on people for your business in the Post Station Town?”

“No, there’s no problem now. There might be if the number of stalls increased to three.”

“Is that so. You can ask the Fou and Lan houses for help when the time comes. To be honest, unlike the large Wu clan and house Lutim, it’s hard for us to spare the manpower to work in town for half a day.”

Rii Sudora then said with a refreshing smile:

“The Sudora house has too few people, so the women are free. Even though the branch houses and kin houses had all joined the main house in recent years, there are still only four men and five women in the Sudora house. And... there aren’t any children that we need to take care of.”

After asking, I realized the Fou and Lan houses were short on women. They had to put in quite a bit of effort to make time for the cooking lessons.

They already earned quite a fair amount by selling meat to the Fa house, so there wasn’t a need to force the issue and get someone to take over Rii Sudora. But for the sake of the Fa house who had helped them so much, they had steeled themselves to endure more hardships.

“In that case, I will discuss this again if I’m really short on manpower. I want to share this with the other houses like the Gazu and Latzu too.”

“Is that so. Feel free to call on us when the time comes. We want to help the Fa house too.”

“Thank you very much. I’m happy to hear that.”

And so, the topic came to an end. However... there was still a girl with a gloomy expression.

That was Tulu Dean.

Before I even asked, Jass Dean said:

“The Dean house can spare some women. But as you know, the leader of our kin houses, the house head of Zaza doesn’t agree with the Fa house’s business. It pains me to say that I can’t repay the favor despite everything you have done for us.”

“Ah, it’s fine, don’t...”

If I had known this would happen, I wouldn’t have told this to the Dean house. The Dean house was a kin house of the Zaza house, and they were only permitted to learn bloodletting and cooking, but prohibited from taking part in the Fa house’s business operations.

Jass Dean said calmly: “...Tulu Dean, you want to help Asuta, isn’t that right?”

Tulu Dean shook her head along with her twin tails.

“I will obey the arrangement of the tribal chief and house head.”

Her voice was soft but filled with strength.

But she was tearing up.

“I will do my best to get acknowledged by the Zaza house head. When I’m allowed to seek help from the Dean house, I will come to find you again, alright?”

Tulu Dean answered with a nod: “Okay.”

We were still caught up with the issues of Pyschkurewuss and Geta, but I will work hard so that I could face the Zaza house head and the others one day.

Also... The heir to the Wu clan, which has rendered me the most support so far, Jiza Wu.

It’s been a long time since I had a heart-to-heart conversation with Jiza Wu. The last time I learned about how he felt was before the House Head Conference.

I don't really dare to imagine this, but if something happens to Donda Wu, the Fa house will be in an awkward position.

Their kins, the Lutim and Lei houses, were friendly towards the Fa house so Jiza Wu couldn't turn his back on us so easily.

But if both tribal chiefs from the Wu clan and Zaza house withdrew their support for the Fa house, there was no telling how things might turn out. I thought about how arduous the path ahead of me was and then said in a cheerful voice to brighten the heavy atmosphere: "Alright then."

"The meat patty is taking shape. Lastly, let me demonstrate in the stoves outside on how to grill the meat patty for taste testing."

The women became cheerful and stood up with a smile.

The meat patty for taste testing was made by Rii Sudora with the Fa house's meat. I brought along a bottle of fruit wine along to steam the meat and opened the door.

And found my beloved house head Ai Fa standing right outside.

"Uwahh, that's a huge one!"

I blurted that out before saying "Welcome home". Ai Fa was carrying a male kiba between 70 to 80 kg on her back.

Ai Fa nodded with a grunt, the sweat on her face was glistening, and she was panting hard. That was only natural since she was carrying such a heavy load and trekking back home through the forest. Ai Fa dropped the kiba by her feet and then took a breather.

"It fell into a trap I set nearby. I let most of its blood out so it would be a pity if I left it to the munto. Hence, I brought it home. But... I'm a little tired."

"Of course you are. Thank you for your hard work, Ai Fa."

"Yes, you too..."

Ai Fa's eyes were shining a little.

She must be happy that I came home safe.

But because of the women standing behind me, she kept a straight face to show them her dignity as a house head.

“Ai Fa, you are amazing! You took down such a big one by yourself?”

Ludo Wu and Shin Wu appeared out of nowhere and ran over.

Ai Fa turned back and acknowledged them with her gaze.

“You have been protecting the Fa house, thank you.”

“Don’t be so reserved. By the way, you really are amazing. That guy fell into a trap?”

“Yes. It fell into a hole, and I killed it off easily.”

“Anyone can kill it, but setting the trap in the right place is the ability of the hunter. And you dragged it out of the trap by yourself and bloodlet it? That’s incredible.”

Ludo Wu praised Ai Fa unreservedly.

But Shin Wu who was standing beside him... If I wasn't mistaken, he seemed to be in deep thought.

In the past, Shin Wu wanted Ai Fa to teach him how to perform the dangerous “Sacrificial Hunting Method”. Even though he didn't need to worry about money after his elder sister started working in the Post Station Town, the young 16 years old house head was probably dissatisfied with his lack of abilities.

Ai Fa, Ludo Wu, and Rau Lei who were about his size and age had extraordinary capabilities; also... he definitely was frustrated that he let Geta escape yesterday.

I think Ai Fa and Ludo Wu are well beyond standard levels, so Shin Wu has nothing to be ashamed of... But it's fine for him to think that way too.

If my culinary skills lost out to someone around my age, I would definitely be too frustrated to sleep at night.

But I couldn't help Shin Wu.

As I was wondering about all that, Ai Fa who was staring at my hands asked: "...Are these hamburg steaks for tonight's dinner?"

"No, this is just for demonstration use." After answering that, I quickly shook my head. "Then let's have hamburg steak for dinner tonight! After seeing everyone making it, I feel like eating one too."

Her eyes that had turned sullen started sparkling again, and Ai Fa muttered: "Is that so." Ai Fa's favorite food was still hamburg steak, and I felt relieved that I didn't betray Ai Fa's expectations.

At this moment, Ludo Wu tilted his head with a grunt.

"There're sounds of Totos footsteps; it must be people from the Zaza or Sauti house."

Ai Fa and Shin Wu nodded and then turned their gazes to the road.

I couldn't hear anything at all. But less than 5 seconds later, a large Totos appeared. It charged right out of the forest and went right for us.

I yelled "Uwah!" and almost dropped my plate.

A few girls almost screamed too.

But that Totos didn't run into us... It wasn't fended off by Ai Fa and Ludo Wu either; the rider stopped it in the nick of time.

"Ah, sorry about that! I had too much fun riding and kicked the stomach of the Totos a little too much."

A lively voice came from above us.

He wasn't from the Zaza or Sauti house.

"Hmm? Rau Lei?"

"Hey, we haven't met since the Harvest Festival, Asuta."

Long blonde hair, bright-blue eyes, an androgynous face, and a smile that didn't really suit him... It was the young head of the Lei house, Rau Lei.

"...I really hope you can restrain yourself a little. I thought I was going to die in a crash."

Another voice came from behind him.

A husky and sexy voice... It was Yamiel Lei. She was grabbing Rau Lei's back over his cape.

"Rau Lei, why are you riding a Totos? Did you borrow it from the Sauti house?"

Rau Lei shook his head in response to Ludo Wu's query.

"This is the Lei house's Totos. I bought it in the Post Station Town today."

"Huh!? You bought it yourself? From a Totos shop in the Post Station Town?"

I was shocked too.

"Yes, that's right."

Rau Lei puffed his chest out proudly.

"It cost quite a lot of tusks and horns too. But it couldn't be helped since I wanted to buy one, so I chose the cheapest one."

Speaking of which, this Totos was one size smaller than the other four in the Forest's Edge. It was also young and not very used to being ridden on. Its feathers were a lighter shade than Gilulu, and its eyes seemed really sharp.

"As I said, it was my bad for scaring you. I didn't mean any ill will, so I hope you can forgive me."

Rau Lei dismounted softly.

He then looked at Yamiel Lei who was still on the Totos in surprise.

“What are you doing? Hurry on down.”

“Don’t make it sound so simple... I’m not a hunter.”

“What do you mean, it’s not that high up that you have to nag about it. Enough already, just jump down.”

“Hey, stop the Totos from moving.”

Yamiel Lei glared at Rau Lei with cold eyes.

But her fingers were hanging on the Totos’ feathers with a death grip.

Rau Lei remained very forthright: “You are really all looks and no substance. You look tall and strong for a woman but are actually as weak as a child. This must be retribution for the depravity of the Tsun clan.”

Yamiel Lei was weaker than normal women; I noticed that after teaching her cooking for a couple of times.

But she wasn’t so weak that she couldn’t manage the work in the Forest’s Edge, so this was just her being a delicate lady... As I was thinking about that, Yamiel Lei glared at me with scary eyes for some reason.

“It can’t be helped. Here, come on down.”

Rau Lei offered his hand.

Yamiel Lei grunted softly, ignored Rau Lei’s hand, and then landed gracefully on the ground.

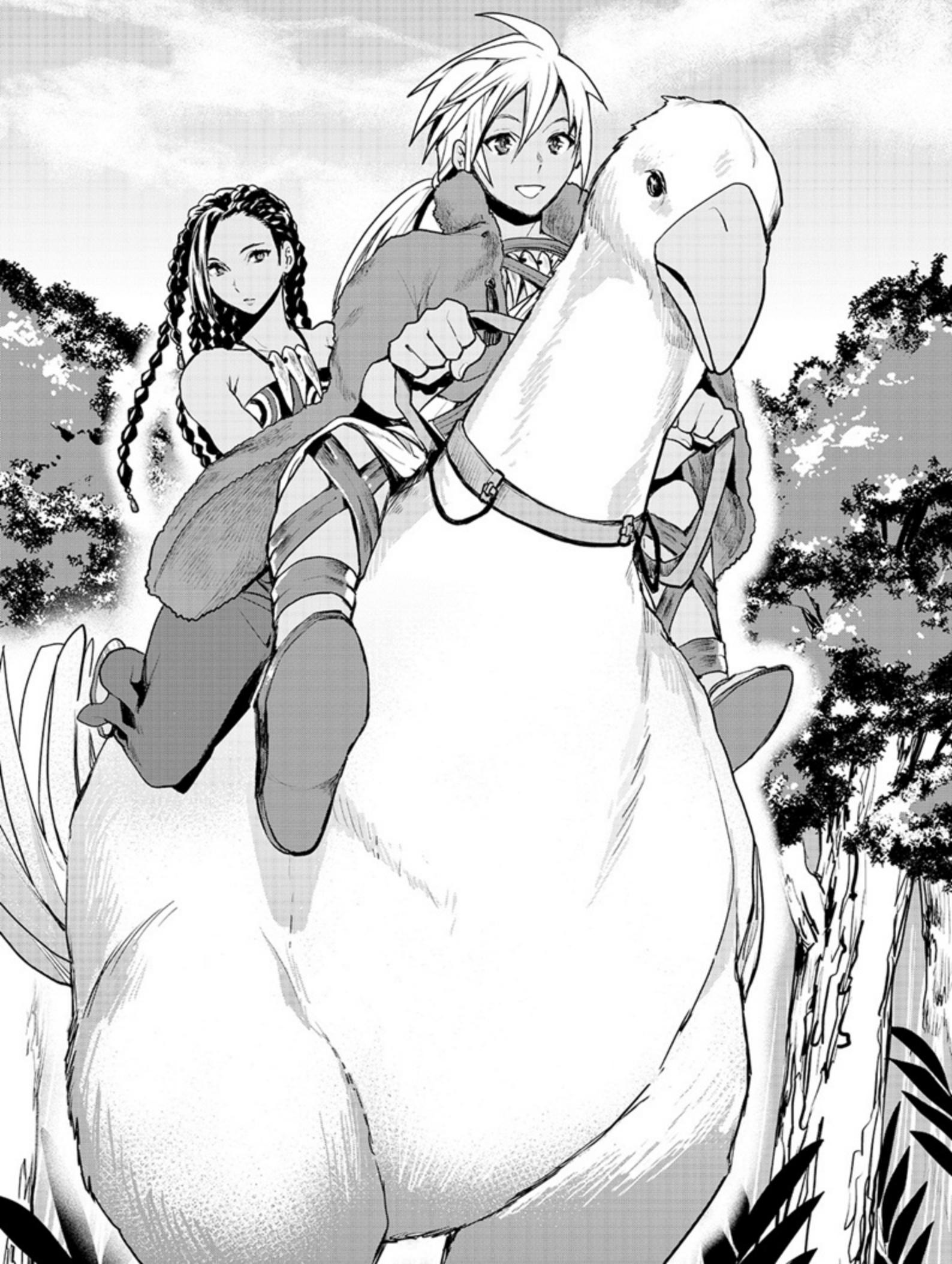
“Why you! Are you trying to shame your house head!?”

“So noisy.”

Yamiel Lei flicked back her long dark-brown hair.

Yamiel Lei’s figure was as thicc as Vena Wu’s, and had a sexy air about her that was different from Vena Wu.

Her hair was tied up in an intricate pattern which was rarely seen amongst the women of Forest's Edge. Her venom snake-like aura was gone, but her icy and dignified air remained unchanged.



But it was great that she was lively instead of gloomy.

Ludo Wu asked on behalf of all of us:

“...So, what are the two of you doing here?”

“Huh? I brought Yamiel Lei here to learn cooking, of course! The women from House Lutim had been teaching her, but if she needs to learn, it will be faster to get Asuta to teach her directly.”

Rau Lei then looked at Ai Fa with his hunter’s eyes for some reason.

“And I’m here to challenge the head of the Fa house! You might be a hunter, but you are also a woman; I’m vexed that I lost to you!”

Ai Fa tilted her head and sighed softly.

“It must be hard traveling so far, but I still have chores to do. I don’t have time for such annoying things.”

Rau Lei lost to Ai Fa in the Wu clan’s Harvest Festival. He looked really unhappy during that night’s banquet.

However, there was glory in winning in the test of might contest, but there wasn’t any shame in losing. Despite that, Rau Lei was still frustrated with his loss. He became more unhappy after hearing Ai Fa’s cold response.

“What do you mean by annoying!? Aren’t you done with your hunting? That is a nice kiba.”

“That’s why I’m going to skin the kiba and eviscerate it. I also want to learn to clean the offals.”

“Huh?”

This time, I was the one who was surprised.

Ai Fa glared at Rau Lei and said stiffly:

“Cleaning offals takes a lot of time. Asuta still needs to prepare for dinner and tomorrow’s business, so I have decided to share some of his work. That’s why... I have no time for you.”

“In that case, I too will help! And then you can use the freed time to spar with me!”

Ai Fa sighed again.

“It’s pointless for someone to help when I’m learning. Also... Like I said that night, the results will be the same no matter how many times you try.”

“What did you say!? Is the gulf in our capabilities that big!?”

There was a dangerous gleam in Rau Lei’s eyes.

Ai Fa squinted in surprise when she heard that.

“Head of the Lei house, I’m sorry to say this, but I don’t think I will lose to you at all. And it’s true... This might sound strange, but I can feel that you are stronger than the second son of the Wu clan...”

“That’s right! I’m confident of being on par with Darum Wu!”

“Hmm... Could it be...”

Ai Fa looked at Shin Wu.

“I’m sorry, Shin Wu, can you spar with the head of the Lei house?”

Shin Wu looked back at Ai Fa calmly.

“...Rau Lei is one of the eight braves; I’m no match for him.”

“That might not be so. I think you can defeat him.”

When he heard that, Rau Lei said before Shin Wu could respond.

“Alright! I will be your opponent! Ai Fa, if I win, you will spar with me!”

Ai Fa shrugged and said: "Whatever"

And so, a match started abruptly.

After removing their hunter's cape and blades, the two of them faced each other in the grass plains.

"Shin Wu, come at me, bro! I won't hold a grudge even if you best me."

He said all that so Rau Lei couldn't relax at all.

That was only natural as this wasn't a simple match. To the hunters, this was a sacred contest.

The raging fire of a hunter burned in Shin Wu's usually calm eyes. He bent forward a little, and, to my eyes, the air of intimidation coming from him was as strong as Rau Lei.

It was hard to stay calm since I could witness a contest between hunters from so close. I gulped and looked at the two of them facing off.

But the contest was decided in an instant.

The moment Ludo Wu sounded off "Begin!", Rau Lei grabbed Shin Wu hard... His arm then got twisted, and his entire body got thrown onto the ground.

"Huh?"

Rau Lei jumped up.

"Shin Wu, you are really fast. Sorry... can I have another match?"

"Okay."

This time, Rau Lei's chest was grabbed, and he was thrown by a standard small inner reap.

"What the hell, Shin Wu, you are hella strong! Why did you lose so quickly during the Harvest Festival?"

Rau Lei grumbled while seated on the ground, while Shin Wu looked at Ai Fa puzzledly.

But Ludo Wu was the one who muttered: "I see."

"I know, I know. Shin Wu is fast, but, Rau Lei, you fought in the same style as Darum-nii and Jiza-nii even though you are thinner than them."

"Huh? What are you talking about!?"

"Simply put, you are using brute force. Shin Wu and I don't. Ai Fa probably didn't defeat Darum-nii by brute force. We don't stand a chance unless we make use of the opponent's strength."

"I don't understand. Isn't using your strength only natural in a contest? How is using your opponent's strength a skill?"

"No, if you think about it the other way, this method will allow you to defeat an opponent who is bigger than you. Didn't you defeat Jii Mamu too?"

"Yes, I won two matches out of three."

Rau Lei puffed his chest out as he sat cross-legged in the grass.

Jii Mamu was a big guy amongst the Wu clan kins. Ai Fa and Mida both won against him, but Shin Wu lost to him.

"...Could it be... Head of the Lei house, were you bigger than the other children when you were young?"

Ai Fa fell into deep thought and asked with her arms crossed.

Rau Lei nodded: "That's true."

"I remember being one of the bigger children in the Lei village during childhood. After becoming hunters, most of them got bigger than me. And after a couple of years, they became all taller than me."

"That's why you keep competing with brute strength. I'm surprised that you won against an opponent bigger than you... But you can never defeat Donda Wu and Dan

Lutim. It will be difficult for you to best Jiza Wu and Kaslan Lutim too.”

“I’m not thinking of challenging them yet...”

Rau Lei opened his aqua-colored eyes wide mid-sentence.

“Wait! Ai Fa, are you saying you have the confidence of beating Donda Wu and Dan Lutim?”

“I already lost to Dan Lutim. However... I think I can win a few matches if we compete a bunch of times.”

“Ah, I feel the same. I have not lost to Dad or Jiza-nii before. If I think I will lose, I won’t challenge them in the first place.”

Ai Fa and Ludo Wu who were conversing calmly had eyes that were shining with determination.

“I’m a woman, so my strength can’t win against a hunter in the first place. That’s why I’m always thinking about how to train the skills to perform my job as a hunter properly, and have been working hard all this time.”

“Hmm... I’m the same as Ai Fa. Because of my short stature, I have always been troubled about what I should do in order to not be a burden to Dad and the others.”

Ludo Wu continued with a fearless smile:

“In order to let dad and the others acknowledge me, I have been thinking about how to defeat them in a test of might contest. Ai Fa, you feel the same too, right? Your father had extraordinary strength as a hunter too.”

Ai Fa lowered her gaze and didn’t answer.

Ludo Wu looked at her with a similar expression, while Rau Lei cast a sideway glance at Shin Wu.

“Anyway, the three terrors of Morga are the following, correct? Barb wolf is stronger than a barbarian, a barbarian can beat a Madarama snake, while the Madarama snake will best a Barb wolf. Shin Wu is the wolf, Rau Lei is the barbarian, and Jii Mamu is the

snake.”

“Why am I the barbarian!? And... What about Ai Fa and Ludo Wu? Donda Wu? Dan Lutim?”

“Dad and Dan Lutim won’t lose to a snake. So I want to win against Dad...”

Rau Lei rubbed his head angrily.

“...Speaking of which, I haven’t won against Ludo Wu yet. I think we have sparred two or three times.”

“Hmm. Sorry, Rau Lei, but I don’t think I will lose to you.”

“I suspect as much! Anyway... you want to say I’m not at your or Ai Fa’s level yet?”

Rau Lei got up with a start.

“Shin Wu! Can you have another match with me? No, not just once, but many times!”

“Erm, but... I didn’t win against Rau Lei easily either. I had to give it my all to defeat you. If I didn’t gain the upper hand right at the start, I might have lost.”

“Then go train up your strength! You won against me but lost to Jii Mamu, right? Don’t you feel vexed!?”

Shin Wu frowned, and said quietly: “Yes, I do.”

“Then go train up! You don’t have to hunt for now, so this is a good chance!”

As he said that, Rau Lei looked at Yamiel Lei who was standing around bored.

“And so, I will be training with Shin Wu! You go learn cooking with Asuta... No, since they will be cleaning the offals, go learn that too! The heart of a kiba is a delicacy!”

“Why is the head of the Lei house such a brutish person...”

Yamiel Lei sighed softly. Her face was showing a lot of expressions. I felt gleeful for some reason, then turned and looked at Ai Fa.

“Then I will leave the skinning and offal cleaning to you. I will teach everyone to grill hamburg steak first; we will go to the watering hole later”

“Hmm? You are coming too?”

“Yes. I’m still a beginner with regards to dealing with offal. It just happens that a dependable teacher is here today...”

I looked behind me and opened my eyes wide in shock. The petite teacher Tulu Dean was clinging to Jass Dean with a green face.

Her big round eyes were filled with fear, and her slender shoulders were trembling. I followed her fearful gaze... and found it to be pointing at Yamiel Lei.

Yamiel Lei looked at Tulu Dean quizzingly with squinted eyes.

“Ah... You are that little girl from the Tsun clan branch house, right?”

“...”

“And you are from a former kin house of the Tsun clan?”

“Yes. I’m the elder sister of the Dean house head, Jass Dean.”

Jass Dean looked at Yamiel Lei with stern eyes. Her veiny fingers were supporting Tulu Dean’s slender shoulders.

Jass Dean’s younger sister married into the Tsun clan branch house and gave birth to Tulu Dean. After that, her sister was forced to follow the twisted rules of the Tsun clan that shouldn’t exist in Forest’s Edge, and defiled the grace of the Morga forest... and ended up dying young.

Yamiel Lei shook her head, swaying her long hair as she did so.

“Yell at me if you want to; you have the right to do so.”

Jass Dean shook her head.

“Cutting off ties and living properly as a member of the Lei house is your atonement for your crimes. This is the decision of the tribal chiefs and house heads, and we will obey them. Is this fine, Tulu Dean...?”

Tulu Dean answered softly: “Yes.”

Her small face was still green, but she wasn’t quivering anymore... However, she was still staring at Yamiel Lei.

Rau Lei who was watching them laughed heartily.

“The Tsun clan has lost the right to lead our people, so it’s up to us to guide the Tsun clan and former members of the Tsun clan. Women of the Dean house, I will leave Yamiel Lei in your care, although she is a stupid woman.”

Jass Dean nodded: “I understand.”

“Well then, let’s get on with our jobs, Shin Wu. Oh, right...! Asuta, how does Yamiel Lei smell?”

“Huh? Smell?”

“Yes. It has been twenty days since the House Head Conference, so I have stopped smearing her with lilo juice. I think the blood stench on her is almost gone, can you help me check?”

“Ah, well, it’s fine, I don’t mind now.”

“Really? Smell it carefully. Hey... Yamiel Lei.”

Yamiel Lei sighed and walked towards me.

She then pulled back her hair and leaned her neck before my nose.

The smell of a denizen of Forest's Edge... The aroma of a young girl entered my nasal cavity.

“...How is it?”

“It’s totally fine!”

Yamiel Lei lifted her head and glared at me from close up.

Her icy eyes that used to be like a venomous snake looked at me a little flusteredly.

“I-I’m... I’m glad you’re fine.”

I blurted that out unconsciously.

Now that I thought about it, it had been half a month since I last saw Yamiel Lei.

The last time we met was half a month ago, when the body of Tay Tsun who died in the Post Station Town was returned to Forest's Edge to be buried in the forest.

Yamiel Lei turned away and said quietly:

“You too.”

3

“Sigh, what a busy day.”

After dusk, Ai Fa and I ate the cheese Kiba burger made from Semu curd and started chatting in the dimly lit room as usual.

“I met with a bunch of people I seldom see and made some headway in my business too... There’s no news on Geta or Pyschkurewuss yet, but this was still a really busy day.”

“Is that so?”

Ai Fa had a blank expression as she inspected the wine glass carefully. She seemed to really like the wine glasses Shumimaru gifted us. Ai Fa was also looking at them last night.

But her eyes were a little gloomier than yesterday. There didn’t seem to be any reason why she felt down, and I couldn’t read her emotions right now.

“Oh, right. Ai Fa, since we have nice wine glasses and good wine, why don’t we splurge a little and drink tonight?”

“Drink tonight?”

“As in drink wine. Ai Fa, you can hold your liquor, right? We have plenty of fruit wine in the food store anyway.”

But I have never seen Ai Fa drink such fruit wine before.

Ai Fa lazily let her hair down.

“But, Asuta, can you drink? It’s meaningless for me to drink alone. And the fruit wine is one of your cooking ingredients.”

“Don’t worry; Donda Wu drinks like a fish by himself too, correct?”

“...Are you saying that Donda Wu acts more like a house head than me?”

“That’s not what I mean. I just want to enjoy the well wishes gifted to us by others.”

I looked at her worriedly, wondering if she was unhappy as I grabbed two bottles from the food store.

One of them was the high-quality fruit wine Pops Balan gave us, while the other was the shiru fruit juice I squeezed out in the afternoon.

“I will drink this bottle. Ai Fa, you can drink whichever you like.”

“Isn’t that meant to be used for cooking?”

“Yes. But I didn’t have enough time to research my cooking today. It will spoil if left til tomorrow, so I was thinking about drinking it as a beverage.”

Actually, I was thinking about using it as a seasoning on grilled kiba steak in place of lemon juice. I was wondering if the refreshing taste and sourness could cover the gamey taste of the kiba and let them taste the delicious flavor of the meat at the same time.

Or I could add in fruit wine and seasoning to make something akin to lemon sauce. In short, I wanted to challenge making a kiba dish in a different way from usual.

But this research would have to wait till next time. I added shiru juice into my glass and diluted it with water.

The ratio was two parts water to one part juice. I dipped my fingers in to try the taste, and it was still very sour. In any case, this was definitely normal lemonade. If possible, I would have wanted to add honey and ice cubes too.

“Hmm, let me add some fruit wine for the flavor.”

I carefully added one spoonful of fruit wine into my wine glass.

Doing that increased the fragrance greatly. I couldn't drink alcohol yet, but still enjoyed the fragrance of wine and rum.

“See, it's only a wine glass if there's wine in there.”

The shiru juice was light yellow, and adding in a little bit of fruit wine didn't affect its color much. I shook the wine glass gently, and I could see the pulp from the fruit swirling through the light of the candle stand.

That probably intrigued her, and Ai Fa poured fruit wine into her glass too. Her cup was filled with a vibrant reddish liquid, with the side of her glass reflecting the bright red colors.

“So pretty...”

Ai Fa smiled.

I was overjoyed to see her smile after so long and picked up my wine glass. I knocked it gently against Ai Fa's glass, and it gave a crystal-clear clink.

“Thank you for your hard work today.”

I raised my glass to my lips and took a sip.

Lemonade diluted with warm water and flavored with grape wine; that was the general gist of it. It wasn't that tasty, but the atmosphere felt very comfortable.

Ai Fa shrugged and then gulped down the fruit wine. The glass that was 80 percent full was emptied in one shot.

"Hey, I did ask you to drink, but don't push yourself, okay? The alcohol content is higher than in normal fruit wine."

"Alcohol content?"

Ai Fa poured another glass with her head tilted.

"Wine that has higher alcohol content will make you drunk quicker. That's why this wine is flammable."

During the House Lutim wedding banquet, I used this high-quality wine to grill meat. I felt that the alcohol content of normal fruit wine was about the same as grape wine, while this fruit wine was as strong as brandy or whiskey.

"Don't worry, I won't get dead drunk. We might get attacked under the cover of the night after all."

She drank another half of glass after saying that.

She drank it very boldly.

"By the way, Asuta, did Michael of Toran came today?"

"Oh, he didn't show up."

Michael of Toran knew about the misdeeds of Pyschkurewuss.

Shumimaru said he would show up in the "Cryptic Venerable Inn" one day, but that wasn't today.

"What about Sangjura?"

"Sangjura came to buy food at the stall. He seemed worried and asked if we had told

the guards about Geta yet.”

“...Is that so.”

“Ai Fa, you seem wary of Sangjura. Is there any reason for that?”

“Frankly speaking, there’s no special reason. But it will be bad if he turns out to be an enemy, so I can’t let my guard down.”

She emptied the other half of the bottle in one shot.

It seemed that Ai Fa could hold her liquor in the same way as Donda Wu. She crossed her legs and drank unreservedly.

“I have never seen such a formidable townsfolk before; the only ones on par with the denizens of Forest’s Edge... are Kamyua Yost and that grey-eyed noble.”

“Grey-eyed, as in Malfreed? Oh... what about Geta?”

“Yes, he’s is on the level of a denizen of Forest’s Edge. But... he isn’t as strong as Ludo Wu or me.”

Since we were on this topic, I asked: “What about Kamyua and Malfreed? Specifically speaking, how strong are they?”

Ai Fa took a sip of fruit wine a little unhappily.

“If I’m not wrong, Kamyua Yost is as good as Donda Wu, while the grey-eyed noble is a match for Jiza Wu.”

“So in terms of ranking, it will be Donda Wu, Dan Lutim, and then Kamyua. Kamyua seems like a surprise pick.”

“...Honestly speaking, that man is hard to fathom. I don’t think Donda Wu and Dan Lutim can win against him easily.”

“I see. But, Ai Fa, you can hold your own against Dan Lutim too.”

Then the top 3 would become the top 4.

Was Ai Fa really that strong?

Ai Fa stared at the wine glass and said:

“I don’t actually think that I can beat him... but I don’t think I will lose outright either. I might be able to edge out a victory and at worse, I can survive. Even if I can’t win, it’s still possible to run.”

“I see. So that Sangjura is on par with Ludo Wu? Hmm... By the way, how does someone on Ludo Wu’s level compare against Jiza Wu and Dan Lutim?”

“Why are you asking about that? I can only tell the strength of the people I had sparred with.”

Ai Fa grumbled as she took a sip of fruit wine.

She was taking care not to drink too fast. Her way of drinking like a kitten was really cute.

“In a real fight, the results might get reversed like with Shin Wu and Rau Lei today. So I would say Ludo Wu and Sangjura are on par. Jiza Wu and Malfreed will have a tight match, but I can’t tell how the fight between them will actually turn out.”

“Hmm, that makes sense. Ah... last two people then. What do you think about Zashuma and Lavis?”

“Hmm? Whose that?”

“Zashuma is Kamyua’s companion, the one that pretended to be a caravan leader. Lavis... is the southerner who is always with Dell.”

When she heard Dell’s name, Ai Fa frowned.

And took a swig of fruit wine.

“I don’t care about them. The youngest hunters in Forest’s Edge can probably beat them.”

I see.

But Zashuma was a guardian who made a living by the martial skills, while Lavis was a swordsman who had overpowered a few bandits.

That means all the hunters from Forest's Edge were not to be trifled with, and Ai Fa was one of the top few amongst them.

That's amazing, compared to Kamyua and Sangjura, Ai Fa is the most incredible one.

At this moment, Ai Fa suddenly leaned her face over.

"Asuta, what are you thinking about. Are you... thinking about that little girl?"

"Huh, little girl? You mean Dell?"

"Don't play dumb. Or are you thinking about that western girl? You talk very casually with her"

"You mean Yumi? I can't help speaking informally with her. Ai Fa, didn't you hear what we were saying?"

"Hmmp!"

Ai Fa took a swig as she glared at me.

"I don't like noisy girls. And suspicious women like Yamiel Lei are out of the question."

"No, that's..."

"If you want a wife, I hope you can marry someone like Shela Wu. I prefer a quiet and gentle woman."

I heard that before.

But that had nothing to do with me.

Ai Fa leaned in closer.

“Someone like Rii Sudora is fine too. Ema Min Lutim is a capable woman too. But Asuta, I think you are keeping your distance from quieter women.”

“I’m not thinking about that! And aren’t the two of them married?”

“So that’s why you are flirting with the unwed women?”

“I’m not!”

“Are you... harboring impure thoughts for the young girl from the Dean house?”

“Stop it! There’s something wrong with you. Are you drunk?”

“I’m not drunk.”

Ai Fa drained her glass and then leaned onto my chest.

“You are completely drunk!”

“You are annoying... I won’t get drunk from just this much wine.”

She blew her hot breath onto my chest.

Ai Fa’s body that was touching me was also very hot.

“...If you want to take in a wife, I hope you can marry a woman like Sheila Wu...”

“No, as I said, I won’t marry anyone.”

“...As the house head, I should give you my blessing...”

“Didn’t I said it’s not needed?”

“...The house head must give blessings to their family...”

Ai Fa hugged me.

She was drinking, so her strength had waned. But I could hear my ribs cracking, which made me yell out “Ahh!”

“That hurts! It’s breaking! Wake up, Ai Fa!”

“...Asuta, are you rejecting me?”

“No! My fragile ribs are creaking!”

I tapped Ai Fa’s shoulders with all my might, and she finally relaxed.

But Ai Fa’s arms were still around me, and her face lay on my chest.

Her soft hair ground against my nose, and I sighed deeply.



“...My greatest happiness is to stay by your side, Ai Fa.”

I finally calmed down, so she could probably feel my heartbeat. At the same time, I felt Ai Fa's heart pound too.

“So I won't marry anyone. People get married because they want to be with someone forever... That's why I won't marry anyone as long as you are with me.”

No reply.

Did she fell asleep?

I sighed and quietly put my arms around Ai Fa's back.

Feeling Ai Fa's warmth directly made my heart race faster.

Because I have you, Ai Fa...

In these two months, I have met many people important to me. Be it the Forest's Edge settlement or the Post Station Town, I got acquainted with many people that I didn't want to lose. I was supported by so many people that I couldn't even count them all.

However, the one in the middle of my heart was Ai Fa. This feeling had never changed. Not just that, it had even gotten stronger over time.

Ai Fa definitely thought of me as an important existence too. Life was so precious and so blissful because of this belief I had... I knew this painstakingly.

I would never give up on this blissful life and marry another woman. But it appeared that I had not conveyed this thought to Ai Fa properly.

Just how old do you need to get before realizing that you are a charming person, Ai Fa? Why don't you realize that?

I thought as I hugged Ai Fa a little harder.

And then... Ai Fa moved a little like a kitten and whispered to my heart:

“...If this is true, I will be so happy.”

I closed my eyes and rubbed my cheek against Ai Fa's soft hair.

And this long day, the first day of the White Month, finally came to an end.

Chapter 3

Unforgivable Grave News

1

Many things happened on the first day of the White Month, but it still ended peacefully.

But the reckoning would always come. On the second days onwards, our turbulent times began.

And all these were just an appetizer of the big commotion that would happen later.

If Shumimaru's brethren, the Semu astrologist was still in the Post Station Town, I wondered what kind of fate he would see.

Unlike the commotion several days ago, no lives were lost.

But blood still got shed.

And this would bring about a big turning point for the future of the Forest's Edge and Genos.

Judging from the results, this was a positive change for me— but the process involved a commotion as big as the last one and moved the hearts of many.

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“Huh? Is Uncle Dora having a day off?”

Morning, in the Post Station Town, I visited the vegetable stall as usual to restock, but Uncle Dora wasn't there, and his son was there instead.

Uncle Dora would take an off day after every ten days, and one of his two sons would cover for him on that day.

Uncle Dora and five farming families tended to one large farm, and he was in charge of the business in the Post Station Town. He spent half of his day in the Post Station Town, and the other part was used to manage the harvested vegetables. He spent his days working as hard as a denizen of Forest's Edge.

So this wasn't the first time I met his son... But it seemed the reason for his absence was different today. His son who had a buff body and honest face whispered to me with serious eyes that wasn't like his usual self:

"My father is injured, so he will be resting for these two days. Actually... our barn got attacked by bandits last night."

"Ah!"

That exasperated gasp was my only response, and I couldn't say anything else.

The barn was attacked by bandits... and Uncle Dora got hurt. This sudden grave news caused my brain to stall for a moment.

This young man who was Uncle Dora's son and Tara's brother said to me quietly: "Don't worry, his shoulder just got hit by something blunt like a stick, which left a bruise. He will come to work in a few days."

Even though he was about my age, this young man was very calm and friendly towards the denizens of Forest's Edge. But there were gleams of melancholy in his brown eyes today.

"My father has a message for you. The bandits seemed to be wearing mantles made from kiba hide."

"Kiba... hide mantles?"

Mantle was a type of cape, so that was the attire of Forest's Edge hunters.

When they heard what we were discussing Ai Fa and Ludo Wu came closer with stern eyes.

"They were wearing a necklace of tusks and horns on their chest, but it was too dark

so Dad couldn't see anything else clearly... Which is to say, those bandits disguised themselves like denizens of Forest's Edge."

"That's really interesting. So... How did they look like? It should be clear from their face and skin color whether they are townsfolk or denizens of Forest's Edge, correct?"

When he heard what Ludo Wu asked, Uncle Dora's son shook his head.

"They covered their faces with clothes. As for their skin color... townsfolk who are tanned look similar to denizens of Forest's Edge in skin color, so it was hard to tell. Anyway, it all happened at night when the illumination was poor..."

"Fufu, this is interesting."

The raging fire of a hunter burned in Ludo Wu's eyes.

The son of Uncle Dora took a few steps back in fear because of that look.

"So my father was worried about the denizens of Forest's Edge getting framed of being bandits. Asuta, please be careful. My father wants to check one more thing with you."

He leaned forward nervously.

"Haven't all the felons in the Forest's Edge settlement been brought to task? Would any of them commit banditry behind your back?"

"...The denizens of Forest's Edge were deeply shaken by the crimes committed by their former tribal chief clan and they vowed to live a proper life from now on. I had not seen all the denizens of Forest's Edge, but I don't doubt their resolve."

I finally recovered from the shock and answered.

As my mind cleared, anger gradually sunk down my heart.

"And, objectively speaking... after the Tsun clan's crimes of defiling the grace of the forest have been uncovered, I don't think the denizens of Forest's Edge will risk attacking a farm."

"Hmm... That's true. Sorry, but the other families working in the farm are suspecting

that the denizens of Forest's Edge did this, so there had been some disputes. If the ones behind the attack are really the denizens of Forest's Edge, my father will be in a very dangerous situation..."

Ludo Wu butted in: "My father is the new tribal chief of Forest's Edge. I don't think anyone in Forest's Edge will dare commit crimes behind his back."

"There might be some who detest the townsfolk and want to attack a farm. But such a foolish thinking will dissipate when they think of the furious faces of my father and Graff Zaza, the other tribal chief."

His tone was as casual as always.

However, the anger in his heart must be stronger than mine. Ludo Wu's light colored eyes were already burning with the rage of a hunter.

Uncle Dora's son backed away with a groan. When he saw that, Ludo Wu scratched his blonde head awkwardly.

"Sorry, did I frighten you?"

"No... Not really..."

"I wish to repay your trust in us. Please tell your father that we are thankful for his concern. Erm... Is that brat fine?"

"B-Brat? You mean Tara? Yes, Tara is taking care of my father. When my father's wounds heal, she will visit the Post Station Town with him..."

"I see, thank you. Hey, Shin Wu..."

"Yes."

"Sorry, please ride Lulu and inform my father about this."

"Understood."

The ever calm Shin Wu took Lulu's reins and went back the way we came.

The only thing we could do was to start doing our own work.

And finally, Ai Fa asked Uncle Dora's son.

"How many of the assailants were in Forest's Edge attire?"

"Hmm? My dad saw three..."

And that concluded our questions.

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"How infuriating!"

After the morning rush hour was over, we started taking turns for breaks, and Ludo Wu grumbled unhappily.

Right now, the ones resting were Vena Wu and me, while Ludo Wu and Ai Fa guarded us. Since we haven't eaten anything yet, all of us had half a portion of "Myam-roasted meat" in our hands.

Ludo Wu bit into his "Myam-roasted meat" ferociously and continued:

"No matter how I think about it, this isn't the doing of the denizens of Forest's Edge. They should be concealing their Forest's Edge's clothing before covering their faces! There are too many loopholes in their actions, isn't that right, Asuta?"

"Yes. But it is very effective. The relationship between Forest's Edge and Post Station Town isn't too stable, and if words of this spread, we will be repeating history again."

I answered him as we had our meal in the empty space beside the wagon, right behind the stalls.

Repeating history— specifically, what the Tsun clan did. When Zattsu Tsun revealed the truth behind the attack a decade ago, the people in Post Station Town got engulfed in fear and doubts. After that, when Tay Tsun was executed as a felon in public, things started to be tense between the denizens of Forest's Edge and the townsfolk.

"By the way, Uncle Dora had no choice but report the truth to the guards, and his words will definitely spread in town. The problem is, how might the townsfolk interpret this?

Also... if this is a trap to frame the denizens of Forest's Edge, who is the mastermind behind this?"

"Hmm? Isn't it the noble, Pyschkurewuss? Who else can it be?"

"Isn't there another person? Someone, who hates the denizens of Forest's Edge?"

"...That red-haired brat Geta?"

"Yes. Rationally speaking, framing the denizens of Forest's Edge in such a way fits Geta more, correct?"

Geta was furious that his father was executed for a crime he didn't commit. In order to take revenge against the denizens of Forest's Edge, it wouldn't be a surprise if he framed the denizens of Forest's Edge.

What I couldn't imagine was, what Pyschkurewuss stood to gain from doing this. This scheme fitted Geta more than Pyschkurewuss, but I didn't think this is just a simple provocation.

"...I'm concerned about there being three of them."

Ai Fa who was resting with us voiced her thoughts.

"That is the number of hunters Kamyua Yost brought out of Genos. Is this a coincidence?"

"What are you saying? That old guy brought the branch house members of the Wu clan with him, right? Ai Fa, are you suspecting them?"

"No, that's impossible. Calm down, Ludo Wu. I'm... just wondering if his goal is to frame those three hunters."

That line of thinking surprised me.

For example, if the three hunters away from Genos were killed, we would never be able to prove their innocence.

On top of that, they were men from the Wu clan branch house. The Wu clan's

reputation would plummet if that happened, and Donda Wu might be pulled down from his position as tribal chief.

...Which means, is this a conspiracy of Pyschkurewuss after all?

Pyschkurewuss once doubted whether Donda Wu was qualified to be a tribal chief. To Pyschkurewuss, Donda Wu was an eyesore.

Furthermore, Pyschkurewuss knew that Kamyua Yost had left Genos with the hunters of Forest's Edge, so he must know that these hunters were from the Wu clan branch house.

I couldn't understand, these were all just deductions.

Or maybe, the culprit was just a group of bandits unrelated to Geta and Pyschkurewuss who is trying to frame the denizens of Forest's Edge... With all these being nothing more than deductions, thinking too much about it won't be of any help.

I sighed as I took a glance at Vena Wu who had been quiet all this time.

Vena Wu was leaning against the wagon with her head hung low. In her right hand was a half-eaten "Myam-roasted meat", and her left hand... was caressing the pink stone hanging on her right wrist every now and then.

And of course, that was the bangle Shumimaru gifted to her to keep disasters away. Vena Wu has her own worries too.

Ludo Wu said angrily: "So what should we do then? Send people to guard the farms?"

"Guard the farms... I want to do that too, but the farms are vast, right? Just the denizens of Forest's Edge alone can't pull this off."

I answered as I felt emotions surging through my chest.

Of all the farms, the one Uncle Dora was managing got attacked. Was that a coincidence? I was concerned about that.

If he was marked because of his good relationship with the denizens of Forest's Edge, how could I face Uncle Dora... I would never forgive the ones behind this. As a

westerner, Uncle Dora stood up for the denizens of Forest's Edge more than anyone else, so I would never permit him being sacrificed for such a conspiracy.

As time passed by, we gradually cooled down, but a raging fire began burning in my heart. I could feel my mind and the back of my head cooling down, but my stomach and chest felt like burning lava. This was the first time I got so mad since Ai Fa was taken away by Diga and Doddo.

“...Asuta, what’s with your eyes?”

Ai Fa suddenly grabbed my shoulders.

“Your job is to make delicious dishes. Leave the bothersome matters to us. Don’t show these hunter-like eyes...”

Compared to Ludo Wu and me, Ai Fa’s gaze was calmer, but there was still an angry fire burning in them. As I suspected, no one could forgive such a scheme.

As we were simmering in anger, the branch house youth watching the woods informed us that Zashuma was here. Ludo Wu returned to his sentry duty together with that youth, while Ai Fa and I went around to the back of the wagon.

Zashuma already learned of what happened yesterday. While we were busy with our business, the guards seemed to have told the townsfolk what happened.

“There were three bandits, all dressed in Forest's Edge attire; their true identity is unknown. Don’t do anything rash before the truth is uncovered... All these are standard announcements. Anyway, there is no evidence right now, and people who incite a commotion like what happened a few days ago will be prosecuted. I will be going into the city to seek the opinion of my client.”

Zashuma’s employer was Malfreed. Kamyua Yost drew up the gist of the plan, while Malfreed provided the necessary funds.

“Erm, can we provide guards for the farm that was attacked?”

“Guards? That’s the job of the town guard. Not just the farms, the entire Genos territory is under the purview of the town guards. Since they have reports of bandits attack, they should increase the security.”

“But isn’t the commander of the town guards Pyschkurewuss’ brother?”

“Even more reason for them to be vigilant. If they have any lapses, they will be suspected of colluding with the bandits. Hey... Just to be safe, let me warn you— in the future, there might be even bigger trouble in the Forest's Edge. Maybe their objective is to chase all the denizens out of the Forest's Edge settlement.”

“But...”

“Alright, alright. I will give a heads up to my employer that the hot-blooded denizens of Forest's Edge might form a self-defense group. If the castle guards get involved, the town guards will have to work doubly hard.”

Zashuma said as he looked at my face intriguingly.

“You are really stubborn. Your eyes tell me that you won’t take things lying down.”

“...An acquaintance of mine got attacked; isn’t it natural for me to be mad?”

“Hmm. Anyway, leave the troublesome matters to us. The more actions our opposition takes, the more chance for us to grab them by their tail.”

Zashuma left after saying that.

I reached out both hands and slapped my cheeks, and finally suppressed the agitation in my heart before returning to the stall.

“Ah, Asuta! I will have one portion today too.”

Having no clue of the commotion that happened in the Post Station Town, Dell was all smiles today too. Since she was lodging in the city, she probably didn’t hear about that incident yet.

Tara aside, Yumi didn’t show up today either. During this time, the innocent smile of this girl who showed her expressions freely was soothing my heart.

“Erm, how long will you be in Genos?”

Dell who was eating her “Myam-roasted meat” tilted her head cutely with a “Hmm?”

“I don’t know. Business seems to be growing quite a lot this time. If it goes well, we might open a shop here.”

“Shop? I assume it’s not an open-air stall, right?”

“Yup. We will employ westerners to accept orders for the shop and inform us in Nerva, something like that. That way, we won’t need to come here and take the orders, right? It will be incredible if it works... But if we can’t make a substantial amount of profits, such a method won’t work.”

Dell had the face of a merchant as she rubbed her nose.

“That noble old man is really capable at this. But I feel uneasy about a noble getting so involved in business.”

“Uneasy?”

“Yes. Doesn’t it feel awkward to enjoy so much privilege from a noble of a foreign nation?”

I didn’t understand the common sense and customs of this world completely yet so I couldn’t answer. But the thought that Pyschkurewuss was the noble giving preferential treatment to Dell’s father wasn’t a pleasant thought.

“Anyway, that’s how things are. We will be busy from tomorrow onwards. We will probably stay in Genos for a while, but I might not be able to eat Asuta’s cooking in the future.”

Dell said depressoedly like a puppy drooping its ears. I felt lonely just looking at her.

“Is that so. It can’t be helped if you are tied up by work... That’s a pity.”

“Huh? ”

“Hmm? What’s the matter?”

“Ah, because, you said it’s a pity...”

“Because it is. Do drop by if you are free, okay?”

Dell rolled her eyes up and down for some reason when she heard that.

“I-I didn’t expect that. I thought Asuta sees me as a nuisance...”

“Huh, but why?”

“You are still asking why!? It’s strange for you not to think of me as a bother, alright?”

What was going on here?

The first impression she gave me was terrible, and she even punched me in the face twice. She almost got into a scuffle with Ai Fa and Yumi and gave me a hard time... But she had been visiting my stall without fail every day and even went out of her way to bring me a meat cutting knife. I thought our relationship was already very strong.

“At the very least, I don’t think you are a bother anymore. Dell will be happy if others like your products, correct? So I’m pleased when Dell visits the Post Station Town from the city to eat my dishes, I will feel happy about it too.”

I answered reservedly.

And Dell smiled happily from the bottom of her heart; her jade-like eyes were filled with joy.

“Thank you. I never thought you would say that, so I’m really glad. I will definitely come again when I can take a break from my work...”

“Yes, I will be waiting for your visit.”

After saying that, Dell went home energetically too. Lavis who was silent until the very end followed her closely.

Sangjura then visited the stall. Ai Fa who was quiet as she watched with sharp eyes became even more guarded.

“Welcome, thank you for visiting.”

Sangjura was already a regular. This was his fourth visit in a row.

“One portion, please.”

Sangjura moved calmly as usual.

Or I should say, there weren’t any changes around the stall at all. In the past, news of bandits dressed like denizens of Forest’s Edge would definitely make the townsfolk cast dubious gazes at us... But, unlike before, the impression they had of the denizens of Forest’s Edge was much better now.

“Asuta, it’s great that you are fine. Bandit son, how?”

Instead of last night’s commotion, Sangjura was more concerned about that.

“He didn’t appear since that day. He is probably still recovering from his wounds.”

The escorts for yesterday and today didn’t notice any strange gazes or presences. That was a relief, but things wouldn’t progress without talking with him, so this made me anxious.

Also... If he was the criminal who attacked Uncle Dora, how should I face him? Someone who loathed the denizens of Forest’s Edge for unlawful deeds enacted revenge through unlawful means. If we didn’t break off this vicious cycle, there would only be a tragic future awaiting us.

My face was probably showing my worries, so Sangjura drooped his brows a little sadly.

“Back then, was I in the way? Because I use left arm, power control not good.”

I hurriedly waved my hands.

“Sangjura did nothing wrong. Please don’t worry about this! But... how is your right arm? That looks like a serious injury.”

“Yes, no work, worry about money.”

Sangjura recovered a little and smiled.

Because he had the face of a Semu, he could show how he really felt with just a slight change in facial expressions. He had a smile that could put people at ease, just like Dell.

"That must be hard on you. By the way, what kind of work do you do, Sangjura? You don't seem to be a merchant."

"I can do anything. But instead of brain, I more brawn. So usually, help construction carry stones and material."

"I see. So you drift from town to town while doing odd jobs to earn money, huh."

Shumimaru mentioned that life was a journey, and the people born in the plains of Semu would travel. Sangjura might be a citizen of the western god, but the same blood flowed in his veins.

"Then what do you usually do in the day? Ah... sorry for intruding so much."

"In day, I tour town, look for work. I want start work when arm heal. I seldom come Genos, so everything look fresh."

As he ate the "Myam-roasted meat" with his left hand Sangjura tilted his head as if he had recalled something.

"By the way, I heard people can't enter the Forest's Edge settlement as they please. The Forest's Edge settlement, prohibit entry?"

"No, that's not true. But, aside from the laws of Genos, the Forest's Edge also has their own rules. That's why the people in town advise you from venturing in."

Sangjura said without any malice: "Is that so? I want to learn the rules of the Forest's Edge and visit them too."

Ai Fa suddenly interjected with stern eyes.

"You are Sangjura, right? You won't gain anything from entering the Forest's Edge settlement. Why do you want to visit it?"

"There isn't any reason. I like seeing the life of other culture. I heard, denizens of Forest's Edge, tribe that hunt ferocious kiba. Kiba delicious, and denizens of Forest's Edge charming."

Ai Fa was only wary of Sangjura because he seemed strong, so she didn't have anything to say upon witnessing Sangjura's forthright smile.

He continued smiling and said to the straight-faced Ai Fa: "First, I need to learn the rules of Forest's Edge"; after that, Sangjura turned and left.

Ai Fa scratched her head as she glared at me angrily.

"That man has a strange air about him. Why are there so many strange people around you, Asuta?"

"Hmm? There aren't just weirdos. They are just more prominent out of the group."

"But it seems to me that you get along best with the weirdest ones."

"That is just how it seems. Firstly... aren't you the big boss of all the oddballs? I met you before I got to know the others."

I answered half-jokingly, and Ai Fa showed a complicated expression.

"I can't refute that I'm strange. There aren't many people in Forest's Edge who look stranger than me."

"Is that so? Then I will admit I seem to attract strange people, and take pride in that."

Ai Fa kicked me from behind the stall.

At this moment, a group of denizens of Forest's Edge came. They were Rii Sudora and the young hunters from the Lutim and Lei houses.

"Sorry for the wait, Asuta. I'm here for my shift."

"Alright, thank you for coming. Erm... Is there anything different in town?"

Rii Sudora and the others probably learned about last night's incident from Donda Wu.

Rii Sudora nodded and replied: "Nothing of note."

"It just feels a bit rowdier than usual, but the air wasn't as tense as before."

After handing things over to them, I left the stall. I then felt how accurate her statement was.

It was indeed rowdier than usual. I could also feel people casting worried gazes at us or turning back to look our way. But there weren't any eyes of obvious fear or outrage.

They probably felt that it was unnatural for the denizens of Forest's Edge to cause any trouble at a time like this. They probably assumed the even if the criminal was a denizen of Forest's Edge, that had nothing to do with the people doing business in the Post Station Town.

No matter what, we didn't feel any clear signs of danger during our journey to the "Cryptic Venerable Inn".

We entered an alley from the stone-paved road and went into a relatively deserted residential area. But Geta didn't appear today either. Was he planning to hide himself until the wound Sangjura inflicted on him recovered?

If we could resolve this issue, I would feel so much better.

There was a minor dispute when we reached the Cryptic Venerable Inn. Ai Fa and Ludo Wu had a difference of opinions on who should enter the kitchen.

Speaking of which, they quarreled over the same thing during that commotion with Zattsu Tsun. Ludo Wu's opinion was that a girl like Ai Fa who agitated the townsfolk less would be more suited to guard the inn's entrance.

However, this "Cryptic Venerable Inn" was in a place with scant foot traffic and few visitors. So Ai Fa didn't need to stand outside the door. Ludo Wu who left the kitchen sentry duty to Shin Wu yesterday voiced his opposition seriously.

Ludo Wu seemed to think that standing guard outside was more important and had always taken on that role himself. But since Ai Fa who was more capable than him was here, he wanted to go into the kitchen.

“Aren’t you as cute as a girl too!?”

“In that case, Ai Fa is a super beauty!”

Their conversation brought a smile to my face, but they were totally serious about it.

And neither of them liked others commenting on their appearances, so the atmosphere became a little dangerous.

“Erm, how about letting Ai Fa enter the ‘Cryptic Venerable Inn’ kitchen and Ludo Wu go into the ‘Big Tree of the South Inn’ kitchen? That will be fair, right?”

My suggestion appeased the argument.

Ai Fa looked elated, and Ludo Wu gave instructions to the other two hunters. It might not be nice to say this, but their childishness was what made them so charming.

We then went into the “Cryptic Venerable Inn” in high spirits, and the innkeeper Neil who was sitting in the reception area stood up: “Welcome, Asuta.”

But he didn’t usher me into the kitchen as usual but pointed in a different direction instead.

“Asuta, there is a guest waiting for you.”

“Guest? Looking for me?”

“Yes, someone named Michael of Toran. He said that you will know if I told you that name.”

Michael of Toran.

I became nervous; so he was finally here.

He was the man Shumimaru found and who knew about Pyschkurewuss’ crimes. The astrologist said that meeting him will bring power to the denizens of Forest’s Edge.

As a mere mortal, I couldn’t understand the meaning of these words. But I wished to respect what Shumimaru and his brethren said.

“This way, please.”

I walked in the direction Neil indicated. That was the dining hall which I had never stepped into before.

I was surprised by the person waiting there.

“Dear guest, the denizen of Forest's Edge, Asuta is here.”

“Hmm...?”

That person raised his head a little impatiently.

He was a middle-aged man with a wrinkled face.

The shirt and pants he was wearing were a little dirty, but there wasn't anything strange about his dressing.

However... that man was holding a bottle of fruit wine and seemed to be leaning back against his chair and seemed to be sleeping.

“So you are that delusional chef that is cooking with wild games... Aren't you just a brat?”

His yellowish face was slightly blushed, and his tongue seemed a little slurred.

It was only noon, and he was already drunk.

2

Toran was the territory in the north of Genos that was ruled by Pyschkurewuss.

I heard orchards that were more valuable than the farms in the south were grown there. Wooden fences kept the kiba away, and slaves were employed to maximize his profits.

I was being prejudiced, but I thought the people there would be more arrogant than

the people in the Post Station Town or farmlands since they worked the slaves hard while enjoying their lives.

But Michael was wearing clothes that were more worn out than the people in the Post Station Town and was drunk in broad daylight.

He wasn't impoverished, but there was a strange black tint on his shirt and pants, along with a charred smell. He probably worked in a profession that dealt with fire.

Agewise, he looked about fifty. His body was fit for a westerner, but his face and arms were really skinny. He had a large build but was lacking in muscles.

His hair was white and unkempt, eyes were dark brown, and his skin was yellowish brown from exposure to the sun. His face seemed layered, like a sculpture of aged wood.

But his face looked drunk, and his eyes were bloodshot. He lay sprawled on the table and glared at us with her left hand holding a fruit wine bottle. He was a literal example of depravity.

“Fufu... I really wasted a trip.”

Michael said in a hoarse voice and then took another swig of fruit wine.

“Never mind, I only have one thing to say. Don't go near Pyschkurewuss. Defying a noble will only lead to destruction. Farewell then...”

After saying that, he got up slowly.

“Ah, please wait.”

I hurriedly asked him to stay.

“You came to meet me by Shumimaru's request, correct? I'm very grateful, but I won't understand if you only tell me that.”

“There's no need to understand. I returned that Semu man's favor... so scram, brat.”

I realized he was taller than me when he stood up. But his footing was unsteady

because he was drinking, as if he would fall down at the slightest touch.

But even so, Ai Fa was still staring at Michael with her hand on the hilt of her dagger.

“...No matter what, Pyschkurewuss won’t bother with a brat like you. I don’t care if you cook kiba or whatever, just go on with your business.”

“No, I didn’t meet Pyschkurewuss as a chef. Erm... Didn’t Shumimaru tell you that?”

Michael of Toran propped his body up with his right arm and looked at me with drunk eyes.

“I heard that a young man selling kiba dishes and Pyschkurewuss had an unpleasant meeting, and he asked me to give you some advice. That’s why... I’m telling you everything I know. Don’t go near Pyschkurewuss.”

“If possible, we don’t want anything to do with him... But, have you not heard anything about the denizens of Forest’s Edge?”

“Who else but the denizens of Forest’s Edge would sell kiba? Judging from your looks, you are either an easterner or westerner, but that has nothing to do with me.”

Michael then looked at Ai Fa and Vena Wu disinterestedly.

“However... I’m surprised that you brought women to your workplace. You are an incredible chef, so continue enjoying your work.”

“She is my assistant, and that is my guard. I enjoy my work, but I can’t let my guard down.”

I answered a little angrily, and Michael said with a swig of wine: “Who gives a shit.”

I suppressed the rising urge to retaliate in my heart and said as politely as possible:

“Well, since you know about Pyschkurewuss’ crimes, Shumimaru thinks you can be of help to the denizens of Forest’s Edge. If you don’t mind, can you share it with us?”

“You really like indulging in wild delusions. Even if I told you, it’s not a fun matter.”

Michael's tone was pointed, but he slowly sat down in his chair.

When he saw that, Neil called out to me softly:

"I will wait for you all over there. You can start with the day's work after you have finished chatting."

"Oh, sorry about that. I will try to wrap this up quickly."

I nodded at Neil and then sat down in front of Michael quietly.

Ai Fa immediately moved to my side.

"...Pyschkurewuss loves to eat."

Michael said with a wine bottle in hand.

"He hired several chefs and even opened a rather high-class restaurant for them to work in... Not just that, all the chefs in Genos will get involved with Pyschkurewuss in some way. Everyone wants to eat a delicious meal, but that man is completely obsessed about this."

"Fufu, Pyschkurewuss is actually that engrossed with delicious food, huh."

"You don't even know that? Basically, all the chefs in the city are working for the acknowledgment of Pyschkurewuss. Getting his approval means you have made it in life. Those who don't think so will eventually lose their reputation and standing."

"Lose their reputation and standing..."

"Inept chefs will be forced to shut down their restaurants, and the capable chefs would be headhunted by Pyschkurewuss. Those who are capable and refuse to work for Pyschkurewuss... will either be exiled from Genos or have the nerves of their hand cut, rendering them incapable of cooking again."

"What the hell. Does the city condone such illegal actions?"

A furious fire raged in my heart.

Michael smirked intriguingly.

“Pyschkurewuss is a noble second only in standing to the landlord of Genos, Marstein. For the past two decades, his influence and status had never been shaken. Isn’t this the result of the nobles and the denizens of Forest’s Edge colluding together?”

“Huh?”

“The Banam envoy being wiped out ten years ago... On top of that, the murder of the towns guard captain. Aren’t these the results of the denizens of Forest’s Edge working for Pyschkurewuss to get rid of anyone who opposes him?”

I was shocked by his words.

“Why do you know all that?”

“One of Pyschkurewuss’ guards let it slip in a bar. Alcohol loosens people’s lips.”

Was he talking about a guard who was present during the conference between Pyschkurewuss and the tribal chiefs?

Not all the guards swore absolutely fealty to Pyschkurewuss, so this was a good chance for us. I was surprised by what Michael said, but he made me feel that everyone in Genos should learn the truth behind this terrible affair.

“As I said, there isn’t anyone in Genos who wants to bring Pyschkurewuss to task. As long as he doesn’t drag the other nobles in, getting rid of a chef or two is trivial for the aristocrats.”

“What a harsh way of putting it, just listening is enough to give me goosebumps.”

“Fufu. There aren’t any chefs within those rock walls who dare defy Pyschkurewuss. They just need to be obedient to succeed in life. If they use Pyschkurewuss’ crockeries and ingredients to make dishes that satisfy him, they can live an easy life. Only a fool will defy him.”

“In that case, I’m a fool then. I don’t want to cook for that man.”

“...Pyschkurewuss won’t ever crave for kiba dishes, so you don’t need to worry.”

Michael seemed to be wanting to drink his fruit wine and that's why he attempted to take a sip of it with condescending eyes.

But his bottle appeared to be empty, so he put it back on the table with a grunt.

"No matter how much money you earn in the Post Station Town, it's a trivial sum for the nobles. And they won't even look at a whippersnapper like you. So I'm telling you to not worry and continue working hard."

Ai Fa suddenly interjected: "Why are you slandering Asuta's cooking without even trying his dishes...?"

"I'm not slandering him, I'm just telling him to relax. He won't ever catch the eyes of Pyschkurewuss."

Michael wasn't afraid of Ai Fa, who was a hunter of Forest's Edge, at all.

"Pyschkurewuss looks down on dishes made from kiba and cheap vegetables. However, any ingredients can be made into delicious dishes with the right hands. But, this brat?"

"You are slandering him."

The eyes of Ai Fa's emotionless face were burning with flustered rage.

"Forget it, Ai Fa. We are worried about something else. So... Is that everything, Michael of Toran?"

"Yes, what else do you want me to say?"

"I see. No, I'm very grateful that you made a trip here."

So no shocking information surfaced. Michael of Toran wasn't interested in the denizens of Forest's Edge in the first place, so it was only natural that he didn't have any useful information for us.

The only noteworthy things were that someone in a bar in Toran not only badmouthed the denizens of Forest's Edge but also spoke ill of Pyschkurewuss. But it was

meaningless without proof, which was the reason why Kamyua Yost waged this information warfare.

Anyway, Shumimaru also took action without knowing the situation of the denizens of Forest's Edge. So this result is only natural.

But what did that astrologist's prophecy mean?

He said that meeting with this man will bring power to the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Could it be that instead of the information he had on hand, the meeting with him would have a positive impact on the fate of the denizens of Forest's Edge?

But that was a meaningless explanation, and the prophecy added no value at all. I thanked him again and prepared to get up.

At this moment, Michael looked at me with malicious eyes and said:

“You are just a chef from the Post Station Town, can’t you even rebuke someone who is mocking your culinary skills?”

“What? Well... I’m not cooking for the nobles anyway so I am content with just the people of the Post Station Town liking my dishes.”

“Then can you satisfy me? Even though I’m just an owner of a charcoal shop.”

Michael taunted me with a gesture from his left hand.

His fingers had a black tint, just like his clothes. There was even dirt from charcoal in his nails. The charred smell on him probably came from charcoal.

“Charcoal shop, huh. So Genos has charcoal too. I didn’t see it in the Post Station Town though.”

“The people in the Post Station Town and farmers won’t go out of their way to buy charcoal. So... how about it? Can you make something that will satisfy me, brat?”

“...Kiba has a strong gamey taste. There are some that hate it, so I can’t be sure.”

There was no point in being taunted by this drunkard. And he was introduced by Shumimaru, so I couldn't act rashly. Hence, I answered him in an appropriate manner, but he mocked me instead:

"Your ambitions are so limited. That Semu man thinks so highly of you, but you are just a small-time chef."

"Hey, aren't you going too far?"

Ai Fa poked the table with her right hand, with anger in her eyes.

"Ai Fa, don't get agitated. Well... Everyone has their own ambitions, correct? Is agreeing irresponsibly to make a dish that can satisfy everyone a sign of ambition? I don't think so."

"Fufu, looks like you are more skilled with your tongue than with your hands."

"I don't think that I'm that good with words. If you are interested in my cooking, you can buy the dishes I'm catering for the 'Cryptic Venerable Inn'. I'm also selling food at a stall, please try it if you have time."

So I decided to end this conversation.

But he had no intention of concluding the argument.

"Then serve up your dish! If you can satisfy me with your cooking, I will acknowledge you as a qualified chef."

I knew I wasn't qualified yet... But things would only get more complicated if I said that.

"Alright, please wait a moment, I will serve it right up. Please ask the innkeeper regarding the cost."

"Fufu, you are really naggy for a brat. Hey...! Another fruit wine!"

Neil slowly entered the dining hall with a fruit wine bottle in hand.

Why did things turn out this strangely?

This reminded me of my meeting with Dell.

Anyway, starting my work haphazardly would affect what happens next. Milano Mast and her daughter agreed to let me teach them cooking.

Since his daughter agreed to let me teach them to cook, I should be able to work in the “Kimyusu’s Tail Inn” from now on.

But today’s menu was “Kiba hotpot”. For this dish to become finished, Neil would need to cook it for 30 to 40 minutes after our scheduled leave. This would take too long, so I decided to make a portion of “Kiba sauté- Arrabbiata style” with the brought spare meat.

“Sorry for the troublesome guest.”

I fried the meat as I apologized to Neil, and he replied: “Don’t worry.”

“Anyone who pays is a customer. Getting to sell another one of Asuta’s dishes on top of the usual 30 portions is a profit for me.”

After saying that, Neil looked worried and said: “But...”

“Speaking of Pyschkurewuss, isn’t that the head of the Count Toran house? I think it’s dangerous to get involved with nobles like that.”

“Yes, it is... If possible, I don’t want anything to do with him, but he works closely with the denizens of Forest’s Edge.”

This meant that the possibility for Pyschkurewuss to taste my cooking should be nearly zero. The aristocrats didn’t really visit the Post Station Town, and we couldn’t enter the city without an entry pass.

If he was still interested in my cooking despite all that, he could do something by using the privileges of a noble. However, there weren’t any signs of that yet. If what Kamyua Yost said about him not thinking of denizens of Forest’s Edge as humans was true, Pyschkurewuss probably wasn’t interested in kiba dishes.

As I was thinking about all that, the “Kiba sauté- Arrabbiata style” was done.

“Let me tag along. I will feel bad if he says anything unwarranted.”

“Alright, sorry for troubling you.”

I entrusted the job of watching the fire of the “Kiba hotspot” to Vena Wu and went to the dining hall with Neil and Ai Fa.

“Fufu, that’s fast.”

Michael downed the second bottle of fruit wine as he looked our way.

“This is the dish Asuta is catering for our inn. It costs 3 and a half red copper plates without fuwano, and five red copper plates with fuwano.”

“It’s still too early for fuwano. I will be fine with fruit wine.”

He said with alcoholic breath as he placed the copper plates on the table.

Neil put down the meal and took the 3 and a half red copper plates politely.

“Fufu...”

Michael picked up a spoon.

The plate was steaming hot, filled with kiba loin meat covered in the chili-like Chitto and tomato-like tarapa.

I heard that many westerners liked the spiciness of Chitto, but I didn’t know whether Michael was fine with it. In any case, he didn’t seem to be mesmerized by the fragrance.

He was probably drunk. Michael picked up a piece of meat with trembling hands and put it in his mouth.

A lightning seemed to suddenly flash across his eyes.

Michael carefully chewed the meat and drank some fruit wine. He then stared at me with a bewildered look.

“...There’s diced aria in this tarapa?”

“Yes. I’m using it to cover the sourness of the tarapa.”

“This taste... it’s fruit wine and myam, huh. And... Tau sauce, right?”

“Yes, for the subtle taste.”

I was shocked; he could actually tell through the spiciness of the Chitto. His sense of taste seemed very sharp. He might have the sharpest tongue out of everyone I had met in this world.

“Kiba is really high-quality meat. Kimyusu and karon thigh meat will definitely lose to this chewy texture. Hey... Brat.”

“Here.”

“Don’t go near Pyschkurewuss.”

“Huh?”

What happened next made me dumbfounded.

Michael reached for my chest at incredible speed... and Ai Fa grabbed Michael’s arm at an even faster speed.

“Michael, please stop your imprudent actions!”

“Hey, that hurts. You are breaking my delicate arm!”

Ai Fa let go of Michael’s arm crudely.

Michael clicked his tongue and hit the table with his freed left arm.

“This won’t do. If you want to live a peaceful life, don’t display your culinary skills before that black-hearted noble. But... if you want copper plates at the expense of being toyed till you break, do what you want.”

“...I’ll take that as a compliment, thank you.”

“Who cares about compliments. I’m just giving you a warning for the sake of that strangely outspoken Semu man.”

Michael’s eyes were very fierce. They were like boiling pots of kiba soup, bursting with emotions.

“There are plenty who think of money as compliments for the chef. I won’t have anything to say if you are one of them. However... If you are not, don’t ever go near Pyschkurewuss. If you can’t trade your pride for copper plates, the only thing waiting for you is ruin.”

“A future of nerves being severed, correct? That is hard to accept.”

“Yes it is. Life will feel as if you are dead.”

Michael answered in a hoarse voice and slowly raised his right arm that was under the table to my eye level.

His palm that had a tint of black stopped right before my nose.

His fingers were bone-thin but unexpectedly long.



His fingers... the pinkie and ring finger moved a little.

"Only these two fingers work on my right hand. I can't hold a kitchen knife with this hand anymore."

I gulped in shock.

Michael suddenly looked at me with his eyes that were filled with regret and said:

"If you don't want to become like this, don't go near Pyschkurewuss. Just leave Genos. This isn't a place where a normal chef should stay..."

3

After the work at the "Cryptic Venerable Inn" and "Big Tree of the South Inn" ended, I fulfilled the promise to Milano Mast to teach him and his daughter to cook at the "Kimyusu's Tail Inn".

There was less than an hour before the stall closed. We spent quite a long time talking with Michael of Toran, but there was enough time for a preliminary lesson. For the first few days, I should familiarize myself with karon and kimyusu meat first.

I thought about a lot of things after speaking with Michael, but I still needed to concentrate on work. If I neglected my work due to lack of focus, Ai Fa would definitely admonish me... I pondered as I stole a peek at my house head and found that Ai Fa had a gloomy face too.

"...Hey, Ai Fa, what's wrong?"

I called out to her softly as we walked along the stone-paved road. Ai Fa cast a helpless gaze at me and looked frail, unlike her usual self.

"Nothing. My feelings are just complicated after hearing Michael's words."

"Ahh, what's bothering you? Are you worried that the nerves in my hand will get severed?"

"I will never let anyone do that to you, retard. Don't say something so foreboding."

“Then what’s bothering you? Ah... Are you afraid that I will follow Michael’s advice and leave Genos?”

Ai Fa shook her head when she heard that.

What a childish movement.

“There is no way that you will abandon the Forest's Edge and leave Genos. Worrying about that is a sacrilege to your pride and resolve.”

“Ah, that’s true. I’m relieved that you are not worried about that.”

“...However, I’m worried that I don’t have the charm to make you stay.”

Ai Fa tugged at the bottom of my T-shirt casually.

Ludo Wu, Vena Wu, and the others were walking ahead of us without knowing anything.

“You got acquainted with all sorts of people, but the one who had known you the longest is me. I’m wondering if being with me is a blessing for you... Whenever I think about this, I can’t help worrying.”

“Erm, like I said...”

“I know. Whenever I have doubts, you reassure me. I’m not questioning your sincerity. But I will still have such worries because I’m weak...”

Ai Fa said and then lowered her head meekly.

Last night, I told Ai Fa that staying by her side was my happiness, but maybe she was drunk and didn’t remember. Or maybe she just couldn’t stop worrying. No matter what, I had to ease her worries.

“Don’t worry, I will never leave, Ai Fa. No matter how troublesome Pyschkurewuss is, there is nothing to fear as long as Ai Fa and the others are here, correct?”

I held Ai Fa’s hand that was tugging my T-shirt.

After looking at my face, Ai Fa shook her head hard.

“I let you see my weak side. This is shameful for a house head.”

“There’s no shame in that. If Ai Fa is in danger, I will be very worried too.”

Actually, I haven’t met with any danger yet. Michael just said that Pyschkurewuss might think of me as a capable chef if he tried my cooking, and told me to be careful.

But I couldn’t imagine Pyschkurewuss being interested in kiba cooking, and he was in a half-opened warfare with the next landlord so didn’t have the time to be bothered with someone like me.

“But you have been acknowledged by that man who used to work as a chef in the city. Asuta, you should keep that in mind.”

Ai Fa’s face finally reverted back to the dignified expression of a house head, but she continued to tug at my T-shirt.

“This is an honor, but I won’t ever see Pyschkurewuss in this lifetime.”

I replied with no idea how optimistic I was.

Even though Pyschkurewuss had no plans to do so, there was no telling what the god of mischief had in store for us... I only learned about this sometime after.

Anyway, the work for today wasn’t over yet. In a short while, we would reach the “Kimyusu’s Tail Inn”.

“So we didn’t meet anyone in the end. So... Ai Fa, I will go in this time?”

Upon hearing Ludo Wu’s words, Ai Fa became on the verge of pouting. But she held it in and stood some distance from the entrance of the inn after saying: “I understand.”

Shin Wu and a youth from the branch house went to the back of the inn, while I went in together with Ludo Wu and Vena Wu.

“Oh, you are finally here.”

Milano Mast stood up at the reception area.

I replied "Sorry for the wait..." but stopped mid-sentence when I noticed Milano Mast's expression that was different from usual.

"W-What's the matter? What happened, Milano Mast?"

"Nothing... I wish I could say that."

Milano Mast looked as if he was suppressing his rage. In addition to being angry, he was pale too, making him look frail despite his rage.

"My daughter went shopping just now and got surrounded by a bunch of thugs... and was almost abducted."

"Huh!? I-Is your daughter fine?"

"Yes. A customer lodging at my inn happened to be there. The guards came because of the commotions, and the thugs fled."

The one who protected her must be a guardian disguised as a customer. I thanked Kamyua Yost in my heart as I gasped in relief: "So that's what happened..."

But it was far from over.

"Back then, the thugs said— 'Shameless people colluding with the Forest's Edge, your reckoning will come!'"

"W-Why would a thug from town say that!?"

I placed my hands on the counter and leaned close to Milano Mast.

Milano Mast answer in a voice trembling from agitation: " There are still some people who think of the denizens of Forest's Edge as enemies. Those people are discriminating the denizens of Forest's Edge for no reason... Now that I think about it, that red-haired kid who has a proper reason for loathing the denizens of Forest's Edge is more reasonable."

"Could those people be Geta's comrades...?"

"Impossible. I think they are just jobless mercenaries picking fun at the denizens of Forest's Edge."

Was that so?

Last night, Uncle Dora was attacked by bandits disguised as denizens of Forest's Edge. So this incidence didn't feel like a coincidence at all.

However, when Milano Mast heard what happened to Uncle Dora, he shook his head and said: "This is a coincidence."

"My daughter wasn't attacked by thugs disguised as denizens of Forest's Edge. Their target are denizens of Forest's Edge, but the contents are completely different."

"But in both cases, the impression of the victim are the same, right? Getting involved with the denizens of Forest's Edge will bring misfortune..."

"What good will this do for anyone? The nobles? Remnants of the 'Red Beard Gang'? What good will it do to disrupt the relationship between the Post Station Town and the denizens of Forest's Edge?"

It was as he said.

The incident involving Uncle Dora seemed like a conspiracy to discredit the denizens of Forest's Edge... But what would attacking the daughter of Milano Mast achieve?

The only thing I could think of was disrupting my business. It was an unpleasant thought, but if both Milano Mast and Uncle Dora stopped their dealings with me, my business operations would be hit hard.

It might become hard, but it wouldn't be a complete loss. There were plenty of shops to buy vegetables and many inns to rent stalls. If they wanted to make me give up my business, they had to make it so that all the shops won't want to do business with me.

There should be a more efficient way of disrupting my business. Or did they find it hard to lay their hands on the denizens of Forest's Edge directly, so they targeted the townsfolk instead?

“Anyway, just leave those thugs to the guards. Their job is arresting criminals. We just need to concentrate on doing our business.”

Milano Mast said as he turned around.

“Let’s get started then. My daughter isn’t in the mood so I will be the only one learning today.”

“Erm, Milano Mast, do you want to set this matter aside for now? If you or your daughter get attacked again, I won’t know how to face you.”

Milano Mast said softly with his back towards me: “Are you telling me you will shift your contract to another inn? Or... You will stop doing business in the Post Station Town?”

There was a flash of rage on the back of the stout Milano Mast.

“Then will you hide in your Forest’s Edge settlement and stop interacting with outsiders? Will you be happy with that?”

“No, but...”

“If this is a conspiracy set by nobles or bandits, you think they can bring you down? This is the Post Station Town, a place of commerce. I won’t let such people disrupt my business.”

With that Milano Mast entered the kitchen.

I was at a loss, wondering if I should follow him in. At this moment, Ludo Wu pushed me from behind: “Asuta, come on, go inside.”

“Didn’t Ai Fa tell you that your job is to cook a delicious meal and make your business in the Post Station Town a success? Leave the other things to us.”

Ludo Wu smiled as he usually did.

“Wasn’t that Uncle’s daughter saved? Kamyua Yost’s companion did that, correct? If you give up on your business, won’t you be letting down the trust and expectations?”

“...I understand.”

It wasn't just Ludo Wu and Kamyua Yost. Uncle Dora and Milano Mast also mentioned that before. They lent us a hand with the resolve to stay true to their path, no matter how perilous it was.

What would I do if I was in their shoes? Would I think this wasn't the right time, and that I should keep my distance to confuse the enemy?

I probably wouldn't think so. The victim would become emotional and not give in so easily.

...Which means, everyone, including me, is just being emotional. And an advanced stage at that too.

I thought as I stepped forth.

Milano Mast was waiting in the kitchen with his arms crossed.

“...You said that you will be trying the karon and kimyusu meat today, right? I have already prepared them.”

There was a large jar by his feet.

Instead of a jar, it was closer to a bottle. The opening was large and full of rock salt that had a blue tint.

“Okay, before starting the lesson, I need to understand the kimyusu and karon meat, so I will start from that.”

“Alright. Then... I will be in your care.”

Milano Mast took off his conical hat and bowed deeply.

I took a deep breath, cleared out the unease and wavering in my heart, then lowered my head to the same level and said: “Please take care of me.”

“First will be karon.”

Milano Mast reached into the bottle and took out a red piece of meat.

It was a piece of cut meat 15 cm long, 5 cm wide and 1 cm thick. It was mostly red and didn't have any fats. But I could see the white meat fiber spread across it like a web. This was the first time I saw an uncooked karon, and it was bright red like beef.

"Hmm, so the 'Kimyusu's Tail Inn' sells stewed karon meat? Those sold in stalls are grilled."

"The stalls don't have plates. Even though the karon meat is tough, it is still quicker to grill them."

"So the thigh meat of karon is tough. Pardon me..."

Rather than it being tough, there were just too many fibers. Instead of the beef thigh, it felt more similar to a calf or shoulder meat.

"There are plenty of fibers, is the meat usually sold like this?"

"No, it's sold in bigger chunks. To store it easily, I cut them into thin slices and preserve them in salt."

"I see. If there is a chance, I want to take a look at the bigger chunks. Maybe the meat can be cut in a better way. To start things off... please beat it with a stick."

"Beat it?"

I received a thick stick from the frowning Milano Mast, covered it with a clean cloth, and then started tenderizing it carefully.

"By breaking the fibers this way, the meat will become tender."

After tenderizing, the 1 cm meat became half a cm, and it should be soft enough.

But it still seemed rather tough, so I slapped it with my meat cutting knife. This was necessary, but over-tenderizing it might cause the meat to break apart.

"Okay, try grilling this. By the way... is it necessary to grill the karon meat?"

“No, I heard that karon meat can be eaten fresh. It doesn’t need to be grilled for long like kimyusu meat. Grilling it for too long will make it even tougher.”

“I see.”

Anyway, I put a large piece of meat into the pot and scooped it out when the redness was mostly gone.

Appearance wise, it was no different from grilled beef. The aroma was also similar, making it fairly appetizing.

But when I popped a small piece into my mouth... the texture was dry because of the lack of fats, and the fiber even got caught between my teeth.

It wasn’t any tougher than kiba, but there were too many fibers. It was still not suited for grilling even after tenderizing it for so long.

But despite the dry texture and numerous fibers, there was a delicious taste of meat behind the overwhelming saltiness. Stewing it would be the best way to bring out the taste.

“Hmm... I tried karon at a stall before, and they sliced the karon even thinner, so it wasn’t too unpalatable. How did they manage to slice the meat so thin?”

“I can’t say for certain, but they probably sliced it after grilling. Raw meat can’t be cut that thin.”

“Oh, I see.”

A kebab stall I saw in a fair at my hometown flashed across my mind. They probably sliced it off a grilled chunk of meat in a similar way.

Let’s see how thin I could slice the meat.

I laid a piece of karon meat on the counter, lining up the grain of the meat vertically, parallel to my knife. Going as fast as I could, I cut with a pulling motion.

Milano Mast muttered: “That’s impressive knifework.”

I asked Milano Mast to try it with his own knife, and he managed to achieve a thickness of 8 mm. Even if Milano Mast might not be an accomplished cook, he still worked in a kitchen for many years. To be honest, his knifework was better than most women in the Forest's Edge.

And so, we cut the meat we took out into shreds. The meat was already flattened to half its thickness, and it was now long strings.

“Okay, let’s grill it with fruit wine and myam.”

The myam was diced and grilled with the meat, and fruit wine was added in the end to season it.

I scooped up the dish into a plate, and it looked like shredded meat with green pepper without the vegetables.

“It should taste better than grilling it normally.”

Milano Mast opened his eyes wide from shock after taste testing it.

“To think it tastes this good with just fruit wine and myam... To be honest, I can sell it as it is.”

“Karon meat tastes great by itself, so it meshes well with myam. If you fry it together with aria, pula, and tino, it will become even more palatable.”

The idea I came up with at the spur of the moment might lead to a good dish.

However, the taste could still be improved. For example, by marinating the meat like “Myam-roasted meat” or adding other seasonings... Also, the texture felt a little loose, probably because he didn’t use Pico leaves to preserve it.

But Pico leaves aren’t free in the Post Station Town. I can only procure Tau sauce through Naudiz too.

This was a valuable ingredient.

But the research on karon had to stop here due to time constraint.

“Alright then, let’s try the kimyusu meat.”

Milano Mast nodded and reached his thick arms into the bottle again.

He pulled out a white piece of meat which was faintly pink.

“This one is from the body, and this is from the thigh.”

The thigh meat had bones and looked similar to a largely sized chicken drumstick. But the meat from the body... didn’t look like that of a fowl, and was closer to a four-legged critter cut in half. The size was similar to a rabbit.

“There are only two types? In my hometown, the wings are also a delicacy.”

“Wings? You mean the meat from the wings? The head doesn’t have much meat, so I left it at the kimyusu shop. The feathers can be sold for money too.”

“Head? You left the head and wings to the kimyusu shop?”

“The wings of a kimyusu are on its head after all.”

The wings were on the head of the bird.

My imagination was too limited to picture that.

Conceiving how a live kimyusu looked like wouldn’t improve my culinary skills anyway.

“The kimyusu meat is usually grilled?”

“Yes. Kimyusu meat isn’t as tough as karon.”

Kimyusu meat was white like chicken breast meat, easy to handle but lacked taste.

The breasts and thigh didn’t have much fats, and it had been skinned. So it would be bland even if grilled or stewed. I heard that the skin of a kimyusu could be made into leather, so kimyusu meat with skin was very expensive.

In that case, it's better to marinate it in something. Poking a few holes with a skewer would make it absorb water better, thus improving its dry texture.

But there were only a few tens of minutes left, so there wasn't enough time to marinate kimyusu meat.

I thought about a new method to cook it... and inspiration struck.

"That's right! Milano Mast, do you have extra gigo?"

"Gigo? Yes, I have some left over from the ones used for the karon."

So he was cooking the beef-like karon meat together with the herb-like gigo, huh. I never tried that before, so I wondered how that combination would taste. I thought about stew beef fiber dishes, so this might actually be a good method.

Anyway, I needed to handle the kimyusu meat for now. I would try making stew when I have more time.

"I want to try something. Can you start a fire in a stove?"

I minced 100 g of kimyusu thigh meat, mixed in some gigo and then melded it into oval spheres.

I then tossed them into the heated pot, and the pink meat quickly changed color. As I didn't add any oil, I had to be careful not to break them while stirring.

"How's that. Milano Mast, please try this."

The texture was good.

It wasn't sticky enough with gigo alone so it would break apart easier than the meatballs I knew of, and it was a little bland as the only seasoning was salt.

But it had a refreshing taste, well worth the effort.

"Isn't this the same dish you sell at your stall? This soft texture is unique, and some might like it... But those who had tried your cooking might not be satisfied by this."

“That’s true. But if you work on the taste, it will have a deliciousness different from that of a hamburg.”



This could be resolved by using Tau sauce and making it teriyaki style... But my only seasonings were rock salt and fruit wine, and it was hard to achieve that with just myam. Tarapa might be the best condiment for this, but it would make its difference from "Kiba burger" more prominent.

I realized again how much the potential of the kiba saved me. Kiba was tasty with just salt and Pico leaves, and strong seasoning didn't overwhelm its original flavor. That was why I could make acceptable dishes despite the lack of seasonings.

In comparison, karon and kimyusu didn't have much fats, so having access to kiba oil in this Post Station Town where there wasn't any cooking oil gave me a big advantage.

"I will keep this as homework. I will shop around the marketplace to find a herb suitable for the kimyusu."

"Herb?"

"Yes, I think the plain taste will go well with the delicate flavor of herbs."

If I could find a herb similar to green perilla, I could make these meatballs even more delicious. After mincing that herb and mixing it into the meat, I could either grill or boil them.

Or maybe, was there something like the plum? If I couldn't use Tau sauce, making it Japanese style wasn't a bad choice.

"I would like to try a sauce made with fruit wine next. I think it will suit the kimyusu meat that has a faint sweetness. Ahh... maybe the sourness of shiru juice will be good too. I'm studying how best to use shiru right now."

"...You look really happy"

Milano Mast shrugged.

"Just focus on your job like this. You should be grateful to the gods that you can work in a field that makes you happy."

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After leaving all sort of homework for myself, I ended my work in the “Kimyusu’s Tail Inn”. At this rate, I should be able to come up with a presentable menu in a couple of days. It was strange for me to work on a dish that could rival kiba cooking, but it was undoubtedly a meaningful task.

And I can clearly feel that kiba is definitely a higher grade of food compared to kimyusu or karon.

Which means, kiba is the highest grade of food available in the Post Station Town.

And compared to the karon and kimyusu raised in farms, kiba were more limited in numbers. If we could ease the townsfolk’s bad impression of kiba and the denizens of Forest’s Edge, we could increase the value of kiba. With this satisfaction in my heart, I picked up Gilulu’s reins.

We met up with the group that had closed shop, and I said: “Let’s go back to Forest’s Edge.”

The unpleasant encounters that Uncle Dora and Milano Mast’s daughter had, the information I got from Michael of Toran, all these were heavy topics. I could only fight in my own way alongside my brethrens in Forest’s Edge.

“I will ride ahead. Don’t fall too far behind!”

Ludo Wu went forth on Lulu’s back. Ai Fa sat right behind me on the driver’s platform, and the youth from the branch house sat at the back of the wagon.

However... we encountered something unexpected at the very end. We only got onto the road leading back to Forest’s Edge for a few minutes when Ludo Wu shouted “Uwah!” and ground to a halt.

Fortunately, we were moving at walking speed, so I managed to stop Gilulu by pulling at the reins without running into Lulu.

“Asuta, back off!”

Ai Fa roared and pulled me into the wagon. She took my place instead at the driver’s

seat, picked up the reins and yelled: “Ludo Wu, what’s wrong!?”

“An arrow beside my foot! From above!”

Ludo Wu said as he pulled out his machete. I looked and found an arrow embedded deep into the ground beside Lulu’s feet.

“Who’s there!? Come out! Show yourself, despicable villain!”

Ludo Wu looked up aggressively.

The leaves near the top of the trees shifted.

And then...”...Damned denizens of Forest's Edge...” a grudgeful voice came from above.

Ai Fa regained her calm with her steel-like mentality and shouted to the top: “This voice, is that Geta? Show yourself! And... listen to what we have to say.”

There wasn’t any answer.

“We don’t want to harm you. You can draw your blade if our talks fall through.”

Silence.

“...Hey. Are you bearing a grudge because your father was executed as a scapegoat for Forest's Edge? If that is so, please hear us out.”

Influenced by Ai Fa, Ludo Wu suppressed his agitation.

“I’m Ludo Wu, the son of Donda Wu, the new tribal chief of Forest's Edge. The criminal is the former tribal chief clan of Forest's Edge, the Tsun clan. If you bear a grudge against the Forest's Edge, can you speak with my father Donda Wu first?”

Silence.

“We didn’t realize the grave sins committed by the Tsun clan until recently. So as penance, we swear to not commit any more crimes and to live proper lives. We won’t avoid taking responsibility for the Tsun clan’s wrongdoings, but we hope you can give us a chance to make up for this.”

“...Then why are you doing business in the Post Station Town...?”

An angry voice reverberated in the woods.

“...Killing tens of merchants and then framing my father and his comrades for the crime. How can you still show your face in the Post Station Town gleefully...?”

“As I said, we want you to know what we really think. If you can’t forgive the denizens of Forest's Edge... let us do battle to the death. We don't want to be killed for no good reason.”

Ludo Wu lowered his machete and continued:

“We don't want to neglect your opinions either. So, before you forgive us, can you please have a talk with the new tribal chiefs?”

“...The denizens of Forest's Edge are my enemy...”

The voice seemed to be getting further away.



Was he retreating after his ambush failed? I leaned out of the driver's seat on reflex.

"Wait! Were you the one causing trouble for the townsfolk related to us? If so, I hope you don't drag the innocent in!"

The branches shook violently.

I could sense the wavering of the person hiding within them.

"It's fine if that wasn't you. Sorry for the aggressive tone, but..."

A breeze brushed past my nose, caused by Ai Fa swinging her saber before my face.

"Don't say such unfathomable things... Why would I do that...?"

The voice was filled with anger, as if the one shouting was gritting his teeth.

Feelings of fear and unease mingled together, sending a chill down my back.

"I'm sorry for suspecting the wrong person! I just want to make things clear. I can't forgive those who involve the innocent the most."

"Can't forgive... The one I can't forgive the most is you, dark-haired kiba eater..."

The air shrieked again with his words.

Ai Fa wielded her blade again, felling an arrow this time.

"Stop! Are you going to direct your hate towards Asuta!?"

Ai Fa who just cooled down exploded emotionally again.

"Asuta only joined the Forest's Edge a few months ago! He has nothing to do with that incident ten years ago! You have no reason to seek vengeance against Asuta!"

"Don't be retarded... If not for him, you people wouldn't be walking nonchalantly around town... He is the shameless man who gave denizens of Forest's Edge the audacity to..."

“Not everyone in the Forest's Edge is a felon! Just how much do you know about that crime ten years ago? Do you know all the culprits have died?”

When he heard what I said, the branches shook even more violently.

“All of them... dead...?”

“That's right. That's why we want to uncover the truth without making the same mistakes. The denizens of Forest's Edge involved in this crime have been brought to justice, but the mastermind who gave them the order is still scot free!”

“How can that be... you won't trick me with these lies...”

“I'm not lying! So we want to work together with you! Not just you, but with your mother too!”

After a long silence, the branches started shaking again.

“...I won't forgive my father's murderer...”

This time, the voice was clearly fading into the distance.

He must have been leaping from one tree to another.

Ludo Wu clicked his tongue: “There's no point in chasing him.”

This was already the edge of the forest. With the dense vegetation here, it was hard to navigate the area without sticking to the path that was already made.

And so, our second encounter with Geta ended without even seeing his face.

“But he seemed ill-informed. He didn't seem to know about Zattsu Tsun either. He couldn't have been in Genos for long.”

Ludo Wu said as he put the machete back on his waist:

“He will listen if he knows what actually happened. Anyway, Ai Fa, be careful of arrows being shot through your windows when you sleep.”

Ai Fa concurred with a grunt as she sheathed her blade and stared at me.

“Asuta, don’t panic. No matter what anyone says, your presence gives strength to the denizens of Forest’s Edge.”

I nodded.

Geta’s words stabbed deep into my heart. But I wouldn’t change the course I was heading in.

Zattsu Tsun committed unforgivable sins. But that doesn’t mean all the denizens of Forest’s Edge have to live in shame.

The issue with the Tsun clan, the nobles and the denizens of Forest’s Edge... I wanted to let Geta learn all that. Only god would know what that youth would think after that, but I had no intention of being enemies with Geta who held such a deep-seated grudge at just 13 or 14 years old.

I pondered to myself:

I want to talk properly with him before there is any bloodshed...

Chapter 4

Misgivings and Answers

1

The next day, the 2nd of the White Month, things were hectic right from the morning.

We met with an unusual incident before heading for the Post Station Town.

After Ai Fa finished her morning chores and was loading the goods onto the wagon, she said: "Hmm... These are the footsteps of Totos."

When Ai Fa couldn't go to town with me, Ludo Wu would ride Lulu over to pick me up. But it was still 30 minutes before we had to set off.

"Did something happen in the Wu clan? I hope it's nothing serious."

When she heard what I said, Ai Fa shook her head.

"The sound is from the north. It's not Ludo Wu."

"North?"

There were five houses in the Forest's Edge settlement that had Totos: the Wu clan, Zaza house, Sauti clan, Fa house, and Lei house. The only one in the north was the Zaza house, and it was a man from the Zaza house who showed up riding a Totos.

"What's the matter, something urgent?"

The Totos stopped before us, and the man dismounted from his horse— or rather, bird— and greeted Ai Fa fearlessly.

But I was still on guard. Behind the Totos was a small wagon without any roof, and two men were seated in it.

There were three of them including the driver... They were the fearsome hunters from the Zaza house, wearing capes with the head of the kiba attached to it.

"You have not set off for the Post Station Town yet, huh. Then listen to this too."

One of the men said with a booming voice as he got off the wagon. He was the head of the Zaza house, one of the three tribal chiefs of Forest's Edge, Graff Zaza.

His face was also obscured by his kiba cape, but his buffed body that was on par with Donda Wu made it impossible to mistake who he was.

"Someone infiltrated the Zaza village last night."

"What?"

"It happened late in the night when everyone had turned in. Only the night shift watching the prisoners noticed... They appeared near the house where the prisoners were."

'The prisoners' were referring to Zuro Tsun, Diga, and Doddo. Diga and Doddo were detained again after their escape from the Dom house. But they left Zattsu Tsun of their own and warned us of the danger, and that's why were spared the death penalty.

However, they were under strict surveillance as they worked to repair the burned building of the Dom house. At night, they were locked in the same room as Zuro Tsun. In short, they were under probation.

I asked hesitantly: "...Was Zuro Tsun abducted?"

Pyschkurewuss once voiced suspicion that the denizens of Forest's Edge let Zattsu Tsun escape intentionally. If Zuro Tsun got abducted, the denizens of Forest's Edge wouldn't be able to clear themselves of such accusation.

But Graff Zaza showed a ferocious gaze that could rival a kiba from under his headwear: "Don't underestimate me, Asuta of the Fa house."

"The Jean house did let Zattsu Tsun escape before, and the Dom allowed to Tay Tsun flee. These are our mistakes, but we are not so retarded to repeat them."

Because of these two incidents, Graff Zaza borrowed Darum Wu and the others from the Wu clan to strengthen their security. The proud tribe of the north that kept to themselves had actually sought assistance from Donda Wu; now that I thought about it, that was incredible.

Anyway, if too many people were assigned to watch over the prisoners, their hunting would be affected. The kins of the Tsun clan actually going against the Tsun clan; what an unexpected turn of events.

"The infiltrator fled without doing anything after he was discovered. Not apprehending him was a pity... But the problem is what happened after that."

"Problem?"

"The criminal Zuro Tsun had gone insane, saying that was definitely the minion of the city people and asking us not to turn him over to the Genos city. He is asking us to scalp him if his crime deserves death."

"W-What's going on here?"

"...He probably got scared. He has no idea what would happen to him if he gets turned over to the city. In the end, he said in tears that he wants his soul to return to the Forest's Edge."

Graff Zaza scratched his stubble beard as he was reminiscing about the past.

"To think we revered him as the tribal chief previously. Just mentioning the name of that incompetent man makes me grit my teeth, but he still led the tribe in the past. We have been with the Tsun clan longer than any other houses, but we didn't realize how heavy their sins were. That was undoubtedly our fault"

"So you'll deny Zuro Tsun's plea to execute him, right?"

Heeding to that request was as good as turning down Pyschkurewuss' demand directly.

A more intense fire burst out of Graff Zaza's eyes and he roared:

"I know we can't grant it. That's why I'm sending an urgent report to Donda Wu and

Dali Sauti. I can't make this decision by myself."

Was Graff Zaza thinking about conceding to Zuro Tsun's wish?

Zuro Tsun, who was a representation of the Tsun clan's depravity, begged to allow his soul to return to the Forest's Edge in tears... I might be moved by him. For Graff Zaza, who was his kin, his feelings must be even more complicated.

I looked Graff Zaza in the eye again and tried to see him as an individual.

A man as buff as Donda Wu... No, he was wider than Donda Wu and might be taller than him too.

Agewise... Donda Wu should be older. Brown stubby beard covered his face, and deep wrinkles could clearly be seen on the whip-like skin of his face.

...Zuro Tsun is about his age too, maybe younger.

I recalled the face of toad-like Zuro Tsun.

It was difficult to imagine Zuro Tsun and Graff Zaza looking like this since birth.

Innocent babies like Kota Wu were born into the various families in Forest's Edge. One of them became depraved, while the other turned into a seasoned hunter. These might be two extreme examples... But they were blood-related relatives, similar to the relationships between Donda Wu, Dan Lutim, Jiza Wu and Kaslan Lutim.

The kins would play together when they are young... How does it feel to be betrayed by someone like that?

When the sacrilege of the grace of the forest was discovered, the one who suggested for all members of the Tsun clan main house to be put to death was Graff Zaza.

That was the fury of being betrayed by someone he trusted and the cold-heartedness of Forest's Edge that adhered strictly to the rules... But this beast-like man was still human. Just what kind of feelings lay behind his rage? I was too young to imagine it.

"...Where are the Fou and Bemu houses? We have to call for them if the three tribal chiefs are to meet."

Graff Zaza turned his head impatiently from me to Ai Fa.

"If you follow this road south, you will reach the Fou house. I'm not sure about the Bemu house; you can ask the head of the Fou house."

"Alright. Sorry for intruding on you."

He stopped right before boarding the wagon, and then turned to me and said:

"...That's right. The women of the Dean house called for me just now."

"Hmm, women from the Dean house?"

"Yes. It was the sister of the head of their main house, Jass Dean. She asked if they could help the Fa house to run their stall."

That scene from two days ago appeared in my mind.

The stern Jass Dean watching over Tulu Dean with loving eyes.

"The Zaza house has yet to acknowledge the Fa house's methods. But before we clarify whether doing so is correct, there is a need to understand the Fa house better. Can the Dean house, which is the closest of the Zaza house's kin to the Fa house, be responsible for this... Jass Dean proposed that to me."

"I see. So Jass Dean proposed something like that..."

"On the other hand, Dali Sauti kept asking me to try the dishes made by Asuta of the Fa house. But before doing all that, shouldn't we work together against Pyschkurewuss first?"

Graff Zaza said very unhappily and then got onto the wagon.

"Graff Zaza, regarding Jass Dean's request..."

"I can't decide this for my kins alone. I need to gather the heads of all seven kin houses for a discussion. We are already busy enough, and such a troublesome matter is brought up..."

He then glared at me with his beast-like eyes:

“In short, you have the obligation to prove your correctness after causing all this mess in the Forest's Edge. Don't let your guard down, Asuta and Ai Fa of the Fa house. Farewell...”

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Ludo Wu and the others who were headed for the Post Station Town learned what Graff Zaza said from me.

After the morning rush was over, we could finally chat. Ludo Wu, who was standing beside the stall, looked displeased as he said: “Fufu. That Zuro Tsun wants to regain the honor of a denizen of Forest's Edge at the very end. Never mind... He is probably just scared of the people in the city.”

When Ai Fa didn't follow me to the Post Station Town, Ludo Wu would stand at the frontlines like this.

“By the way, if we execute Zuro Tsun on our own, the people in the city would probably complain; Dad and the others sure have it tough.”

“Right. Just what is the goal of the people who infiltrated the Zaza village? Are they going to let Zuro Tsun flee to discredit the denizens of Forest's Edge, or to kill Zuro Tsun and silence him... It has just been a day, so Geta shouldn't know where Zuro Tsun is. This must be the doing of Pyschkurewuss, correct?”

“It's useless to ask me! Ah, my head is starting to hurt.”

Ludo Wu said as he scratched his head.

The night before yesterday, Uncle Dora's farm was attacked. Yesterday, Milano Mast's daughter was almost abducted. And finally, the Forest's Edge settlement was infiltrated yesterday. It was only natural that Ludo Wu got a headache.

Taking a step further, we were attacked by Geta three days ago. Which meant... The group of culprits went to the Post Station Town, the “Kimyusu's Tail Inn”, and the Zaza village where Zuro Tsun was imprisoned; all these places which were guarded had

been attacked.

We didn't know what we needed to be on guard against; anyway, the policy of assigning escorts had proven to be useful. The farm that wasn't guarded resulted in casualty too, which meant things were now worse than we initially predicted.

Out of all the motives of these criminals, we only knew about Geta's goals. Are the rest a conspiracy by Pyschkurewuss? But why is he doing this?

That incident with Zuro Tsun could be an attempt to seal his lips. Or maybe not. As for Milano Mast and Uncle Dora, it might or might not be a case of causing trouble.

The truth was still in the dark.

"Welcome, would you like one?"

Lala Wu's voice brought me back to reality.

When I came back to my senses, a westerner was standing opposite the griddle.

"Welcome, that will be two red copper plates."

"Two red copper plates, huh. That's really cheap. But why the glum face... A businessman can't get any clients with a face like that."

"Ah, sorry."

I realized mid-sentence.

A middle-aged man with yellowish brown skin... This tall person with a wide figure covered in rough garments was Michael of Toran.

"W-Welcome, are you here to try my cooking?"

"Why else would I visit a stall selling food?"

Michael's face was displeased today too.

But his round and rotten log-like face didn't have any signs of drunkenness. His eyes

were sharp and strides were steady. He was already tall, and when standing up straight, he looked completely different from the drunkard I saw yesterday.

“Here are two red copper plates. Give me one.”

He placed the copper plates onto the counter with a thud.

With mixed emotions, I prepared a portion of “Myam-roasted meat” for him.

“You are really generous with your myam. Unskilled cooks will let that strong fragrance break the balance of the taste.”

He grumbled as he bit into the grilled poitan.

His facial expression remained unchanged as he chewed the meat stubbornly without swallowing.

Another customer visited, so I had to attend to him. But Michael neither backed away nor left the stall. He finally swallowed after the other customer took his merchandise and left.

“Fufu... I thought my tongue turned weird after drinking yesterday but seems like I don’t need to retract my warning to you.”

“...Is the taste to your liking?”

In response to my question, he glared at me with his scary bloodshot eyes.

“Myam, fruit wine... and that is probably aria. You diced the aria and added it into the sauce, correct?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Fufu. You also added myam, fruit wine, and aria to the dishes yesterday. With the limited seasonings available in the Post Station Town, you are using them to flavor your cooking, huh.”

Michael started inspecting the “Myam-roasted meat” he just took a bite out of.

“But this fuwano tastes a little strange. I don’t mean it in a bad way, it has a refreshing texture. But there’s a faint fragrance of a gigo...”

My jaw went slack; he could actually taste the minuscule amount of gigo I added into the grilled poitan.

“Well, that’s not a fuwano, but grilled poitan. I added some gigo to improve the texture, and you are the first customer who could tell.”

“Poitan? This?”

He mumbled and then took another bite of “Myam-roasted meat”.

“Poitan, huh... I never ate this before... Is this popular in the Post Station Town right now?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe the other stalls won’t make poitan like this. I didn’t really research it.”

Michael turned silent and quickly finished his food. He then glared at me:

“Brat, where are you from? You are definitely not from Genos. Where did you learn to cook?”

“I learned it from my father in my hometown. My hometown is... It’s a long story, but I’m not from this continent.”

“From outside the continent? A migrant, huh.”

Michael stared with his eyes wide and then showed a straight face again.

“Never mind. Remember the warning I gave you yesterday. If you don’t go inside the city, that guy will not discover you.”

“Erm, but Psy—”

“Don’t say that name in town.”

Thick veins burst out from Michael’s thin forehead.

"He might not visit the Post Station Town in person, but there might be merchants and soldiers related to him nearby. Don't stir any trouble."

"Sorry. But that person has dealings with the denizens of Forest's Edge right now. We haven't noticed anything yet, but he must know that I'm doing business here."

It wasn't mentioned the last time we spoke, but Pyschkurewuss instructed the tribal chief to "not stop the stall operations" during the Tsun clan commotion.

I could take this one step further and assume that Pyschkurewuss has been told by his informants that my business was doing well.

...Dell also said angrily that the people in the city look down on the food made from kiba. I can't tell for certain if she meant Pyschkurewuss.

No matter what, it was the right call to turn down Dell from bringing the kiba dishes into the city.

"You don't need to care about the evaluation in the Post Station Town. The aristocrats won't think of cookings that can be bought with few red copper plates as real dishes. There probably isn't anyone who thinks kiba is fit for human consumption."

"Is that so. I don't feel happy about some of those things, but it's great that they aren't interested in this."

Michael backed away with a grunt.

"If you are unlucky enough to be marked by him, you won't be able to make kiba dishes anymore. Don't ever go near the city."

Michael left in brisk steps after saying that.

After listening to our conversation quietly, Lala Wu retorted: "What's wrong with him? What an arrogant customer."

"He is Michael of Toran. You heard his name being mentioned when Shumimaru was bidding farewell, right?"

"Huh? The guy who can bring strength to Forest's Edge?"

Ludo Wu said in surprise.

"Isn't he just a normal old man? I can't imagine him getting involved with the future of Forest's Edge."

"That's just fortune telling, right? Only retard will believe that."

They started chatting, but I wanted to believe.

I couldn't imagine how Michael would be of help specifically. But he definitely wasn't just a "normal old man". At the very least, I couldn't sense the taste of gigo in the grilled poitan of the "Myam-roasted meat".

A former chef from the city, huh...

I felt a palpation in my heart.

No matter how Michael might interact with the denizens of Forest's Edge in the future, we still had work to do. We had to do our best to resolve the troublesome matters that still laid ahead of us.

2

We finished our work in the afternoon without any incidents.

The town seemed very peaceful.

I could sense that the number of patrols in town had increased a little, but there weren't any other changes aside from that. Sales at the stall remained above average, and the customers told us "Thank you for your hard work." from time to time. I couldn't detect any signs of malice towards the Forest's Edge.

Maybe, instead of more people having good will towards the denizens of Forest's Edge, there were more people suspicious of the people in the city?

Only the tribal chief Tsun clan of the Forest's Edge was given special privileges, while

the others lived in worse conditions than the people in the Post Station Town. This fact became widespread after the commotion caused by Tay Tsun. This resulted in the impression the townsfolk had towards the denizens of Forest's Edge softening a little and their distrust of the people in the city increasing by a bit... That was the gist of it.

Even if they were told that bandits in Forest's Edge garb had appeared, they would suspect the people in the city first and wonder what the truth actually was.

If my impression isn't wrong, they seem to be hoping for the downfall of Pyschkurewuss, that sort of feeling... But it's too early to celebrate.

I couldn't feel happy about Uncle Dora's farm getting attacked.

And those bearing good will towards the denizens of Forest's Edge were still in the minority. Most of the townsfolk were wary of the city people and, at the same time, cast persecutory gazes at the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Are the denizens of Forest's Edge really a bunch of outlaws? Isn't this a good chance to figure this out? — I felt their subtle intent to seek out the truth.

All in all, our work finished peacefully.

On the other hand, we had made a lot of progress.

First of all, Neil from the "Cryptic Venerable Inn" chose loin meat out of the four types of kiba meat and decided to add it to his menu as grilled meat. It was prepared by slicing them thinly and then grilling them.

But that meat had to be complemented with a sauce made from pickled Chitto, fruit wine, and all sorts of herbs. I tried it, and it tasted really spicy and exotic.

"It is a far cry from Asuta's cooking, but I will lower the price adequately, so no one will complain about it"

The dishes I was catering for him was set at the expensive price of five red copper plates. However, the price of fresh kiba cost the same as karon, so his cooking would be priced at four red copper plates, the same as his karon dish.

"I should be able to sell ten portions a day. I plan to sell twenty portions during Asuta's

day off, can I buy the meat one day early?"

Neil and Naudiz were afraid of their customers leaving for other inns. I answered: "Of course!" without any hesitation.

On the other hand, the "Big Tree of the South Inn" had gotten fresh kiba samples yesterday.

My off day would be four days later, and Naudiz spent just one day to decide on the kiba parts he wanted. He chose the more expensive abdomen meat.

"I think this part tastes the best after charbroiling. Can you sell me ten portions for tomorrow and the day after, and 70 portions three days later?"

"Seventy portions, huh! You are really decisive!"

"If I can't sell them all, I can preserve them with salt. At least they won't spoil."

Seventy portions meant 7.5 kg, which was 107.5 red copper plates.

He was probably planning to sell ten portions three days later and thirty portions each during my two rest days. He normally bought 40 portions from me, so it wasn't much in this case... But, anyway, this was a joyous thing for me.

"Thank you for your patronage. By the way... the innkeeper of the 'Cryptic Venerable Inn' has also bought the more tender parts, which are more suitable for grilling. Making a stew with the thigh or shoulder meat won't take too much time either and will be cheaper too. I wonder why both of you didn't choose to do so."

"I see. The innkeeper of the 'Cryptic Venerable Inn' probably felt that his stew can't compete with Asuta at all. Kiba tastes great just by grilling it a little, so going this route is the obvious choice."

I accepted what he said for now.

Kiba was suitable for making stew too, but it didn't mean stewing it longer would make it more delicious. That was why he felt his cooking couldn't match my "Kiba soup" and "Kiba hotpot". The limited choice of seasonings was also a disadvantage.

If this went on, there would be plenty of thigh and shoulder meat left over in the Fa house. We needed to make stew and hamburg steak too, so there wasn't any problem for now. But I hoped for all the parts to be sold.

Never mind, with access to Tau sauce, it wasn't difficult for Naudiz to make a grilled dish on par with the "Cryptic Venerable Inn" anyway.

In order to rival the other inns which had foreign seasonings, the "Kimyusu's Tail Inn" needs to strengthen themselves too.

Today in the "Kimyusu's Tail Inn" we held a mini cooking class as I studied the karon and kimyusu meat.

Not just meat dish, I also taught him how to handle the vegetables. I taught him about the vegetables I was familiar with— how to cook aria, tino, tarapa, pula, chachi, gigo, and myam deliciously.

Slicing into pieces and cubes, as well as mincing. And the cooking method to complement these ways of cutting, in addition to the management of the fire intensity. I taught him tons of things.

However, Milano Mast was the only student today. His daughter was doing other preparation work where I couldn't see it.

"She is really afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge. Sigh... As the one who brought her up, I'm responsible for this."

"Don't say that; this isn't your fault, Milano Mast."

Milano Mast's wife died young from the grief of losing her brother. The ones who killed her brother were Zattsu Tsun, Tay Tsun, and their gang. Given how much the denizens of Forest's Edge had wronged them, it wouldn't be strange for Milano Mast and his daughter to loathe them. But despite that, Milano Mast still didn't break off ties with us and even allowed me to teach him to cook.

I seldom saw his daughter. We had plenty of chance to meet in the past, but she avoided us out of fear. Even so, Milano Mast let us to enter his kitchen thanks to his daughter granting her permission.

However, his daughter was mentally hurt because of the incident yesterday and didn't appear before us. It was the fault of those damn thugs.

Shameless people colluding with the Forest's Edge, your reckoning will come!

We still didn't know who those thugs were. And they spoke in the same way as Geta, but it should be fine since we believed what Geta said.

By the way, there wasn't any evidence that Pyschkurewuss' henchmen were behind this. If it wasn't Pyschkurewuss' doing... that meant there were still people who extremely hated the presence of Forest's Edge's denizens in the Post Station Town.

However, what those thugs did was still unjustified and I couldn't stand it. Like what Milano Mast said, Geta who focused his hate directly towards the denizens of Forest's Edge was more logical.

...Killing tens of merchants and then framing my father and his comrades for the crime. How can you still show your face in the Post Station Town gleefully...? Geta's words still lingered in my heart.

There ought to be people who would flare up against the denizens of Forest's Edge whenever they got reminded of what Zattsu Tsun did. Speaking of which, Milano Mast who overcame such misgivings and started working together with us was the special one instead.

...But there's no use in being anxious.

A foreigner like me loved the denizens of Forest's Edge and the people of Post Station Town deeply. There must be something that I could do about this. And for the sake of that, I would do my very best.

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“Geta didn't show up today either...”

After finishing the day's work and returning to the Wu clan village, Ludo Wu tied Lulu to a tree near the house and said:

“We need to think of a way to get that guy to meet with my Dad. Things will be a breeze

after that, correct?"

"Huh, but why?"

"You see, he doesn't seem to be like the people in town who think of all those complicated things. He looks like a hunter from a mountain somewhere and should get along well with us, correct?"

What an optimistic view.

It was just like Ludo Wu to say that... But Ludo Wu had never met Geta before; despite that, he got glared by Geta's vengeful eyes.

Shin Wu, who was knocked down by Geta before, was helping Lala Wu and the others unload the cargo in silence.

"Oh, isn't that Asuta? Long time no see!"

A large figure came out from the Wu clan main house. It was the head of Lutim house, Dan Lutim. We might not have met in a while, but calling it a long time was wrong.

"Ah, hello. Are you... here to take part in the meeting about Zuro Tsun?"

"Yes! The discussions are basically over, but it's boring to go home now, so I'm playing with Kota Wu right now!"

He was easy going as usual.

Leina Wu was amused by how energetic he was and said with a smile: "Well then, Shela Wu and I will get on with our work."

The production of the "Kiba burger" meat patty had developed a lot, and I just needed to do the final taste inspection and checking of the size. And these steps were just a formality, and I thought it wouldn't be a problem to let them handle everything from tomorrow onwards.

That was why I decided to stay behind and chat with Dan Lutim.

"So, what are we going to do with Zuro Tsun?"

“Nothing. Pyschkurewuss wants us to hand him over to the city, but our negotiations are still in progress, so that will be put on hold... That’s what the tribal chiefs think.”

“Dan Lutim, you look a little... unhappy?”

“Not a little but a lot! That depraved Zuro Tsun had finally grown a spine like a denizen of Forest's Edge, so I think we should accede to his request!”

“Yes, but doesn’t it mean he is fearful of the people from the city? He wants to die right now, instead of being interrogated and then dying.”

To be honest, I felt the same way, but I restrained myself and said to Dan Lutim:

“But even so, normal people won’t mention scalping so easily. And he did so in the Zaza village, right? Graff Zaza might pick up his blade right on the spot.”

Dan Lutim’s face started to frown as he said:

“A man born in the Forest's Edge settlement is begging for his soul to return to the forest. Even if we ignore that, why must we let the city handle his sentencing? I still don’t understand what Donda Wu is thinking.”

“This is a problematic issue for the tribal chiefs too. The other side was asking for all the Tsun clan members in the beginning. If we are not willing to even hand Zuro Tsun over to them, they might suspect the denizens of Forest's Edge of treason...”

“We are not traitors. Is refusing strange demands a treasonous act?”

Dan Lutim was forthright in his opinions, so forthright that I was stumped.

Pyschkurewuss made this demand because he “can’t trust the denizens of Forest's Edge”. So leaving tactics and logic aside, all that’s left was Dan Lutim unfiltered opinion.

“According to the laws of Genos, foraging the grace of the Morga forest isn’t punishable by death, correct?”

“Yes, I heard about it. Normally, the rules in Forest's Edge are stricter than the laws of

Genos."

The one telling me this information was the son of the guy pouting before me.

"Speaking of which, handing Zuro Tsun over to the city is a chance for him to survive. But instead, he is asking to be scalped. I'm impressed."

"That's true. It is normal to think this way..."

But our opponent was the mysterious Pyschkurewuss. Zuro Tsun was wailing that "I don't know what will happen to me", so he must have been incredibly spooked.

And not just Zuro Tsun, Pyschkurewuss insisted that the other members of the Tsun clan should be turned over to him. His reason was that the punishment by the denizens of Forest's Edge was too lenient, so he must have had a reason to kill Zuro Tsun off.

If that was true, I could understand why Zuro Tsun was so scared...

At this moment, a question sprung up in my mind.

But, why is he so adamant on wiping out the Tsun clan?

Going by common sense, it should be related to the great felon Zattsu Tsun.

For example, there might be a secret agreement between Zattsu Tsun and Pyschkurewuss, and letting someone who knew the truth alive was detrimental to Pyschkurewuss... If that was what Genos liaison thought, Zuro Tsun might get tortured and interrogated, and Pyschkurewuss would be filled with doubt and want to seal the lips of all the main house members.

However, did that secret really exist? Even if it was so, did Zuro Tsun need to keep the secret under wraps?

Zuro Tsun had been imprisoned for twenty-odd days. During this time, the men from the Zaza house had probably pressed him about his crimes, and Zuro Tsun would have plenty of chance to confess.

Or rather... If he was that afraid of the people in the city, he should have used this

chance to spill everything out while he was still in Forest's Edge. After revealing the content, it would cease to be a secret, and there wouldn't be any need for interrogation or sealing of his lips. Since he had the resolve to be scalped, that was what he should have done.

There might be a critical secret for Pyschkurewuss, and uncovering it would endanger all denizens of Forest's Edge... Is that even possible?

In any case, I didn't think such a secret existed.

If there was one, Pyschkurewuss wouldn't have left Zuro Tsun alone for such a long time. We were ready to hand over Zattsu Tsun and Zuro Tsun in the first place, so if they didn't demand all members of the Tsun clan, the negotiations wouldn't have stalled in the first place.

And on second thought... The idea of a "secret agreement between Pyschkurewuss and Zattsu Tsun" was already far-fetched. Zattsu Tsun didn't think he was working together with Pyschkurewuss in the first place and felt he was being exploited. Even if there was such a deal, it was unlikely that Zattsu Tsun would honor it. Zattsu Tsun was still preaching his hatred for the people of Genos right up until his death.

It was the same for Tay Tsun. It's impossible for Zuro Tsun to be the only one to know too.

But what was the truth?

Why was Pyschkurewuss so adamant about us handing over Zuro Tsun and the members of the main house? Why was Zuro Tsun so afraid of being extradited to the city? This was making less and less sense.

But I knew one thing: we couldn't ask Pyschkurewuss about this, but we could probe Zuro Tsun.

"..Is Donda Wu home?"

After getting a positive answer, I entered the Wu clan main house alone.

Waiting inside were the clan head, the eldest son and his spouse, and their son.

With the rowdy guest gone, it was time for the family to enjoy themselves.

Ushered in by Sati Lei Wu who was carrying Kota Wu, I apologized for my sudden visit.

“Enough with the useless talk. What do you want with me?”

I told the displeased Donda Wu about my doubts. But my explanation was too vague, and he couldn’t understand my worries.

“I don’t understand... Can’t you make it simpler?”

“Sorry about that. I don’t really get where the heart of the issue is either... Anyway, it’s about what Zuro Tsun is afraid of. Staying in the Forest’s Edge will end with a death sentence too, so why should he fear the city people?”

“But someone infiltrated the Zaza village last night. He lost it when he knew that the city side has their eyes on him... Are you saying this reasoning doesn’t make sense?”

Jiza Wu responded.

He was smiling as usual, and I couldn’t tell what he was thinking at all.

“Yes, for example, if Pyschkurewuss’ goal is to seal his lips, he has no reason to be afraid as both paths lead to his death. So Zuro Tsun is scared because he feels that he will experience something worse than death if he gets captured.

“A fate worse than death... Isn’t that torture or interrogation, or something?”

“That’s what I thought in the beginning. But if there was a secret that Zuro Tsun would only spill under interrogation, he just needs to tell us before he gets handed over to the city, and then there won’t be any value in interrogating him.”

“...What other reasons might there be?”

When I heard Donda Wu’s question, I shook my head: “I don’t know.”

“Then shouldn’t we ask Zuro Tsun? Ask him what he is afraid of. Zuro Tsun has been dealing with Pyschkurewuss for the past decade as the tribal chief, correct? Zuro Tsun will know best what Pyschkurewuss is thinking about, right?”

“...Indeed. Only Zuro Tsun who has been tainted by the Rock City will understand the evil in the hearts of the rock city denizens.”

Donda Wu stroked his mane-like beard.

“You should have said that before the other tribal chiefs left. Hey... Is Ludo Wu going to use the Wu clan’s Totos?”

“That’s right; the plan is for him to escort me to the Fa house and stay until Ai Fa reaches home.”

I didn’t need to explain further because this plan was set by Donda Wu.

“Then use the other Totos. If the head of the Lei house went to the Fa house, tell him to go straight to the Zaza village and relay what we just discussed to them.”

“Huh? Rau Lei is at the Fa house?”

“Didn’t you arrange this with him? That’s what he said.”

I didn’t make any arrangement with him; was he bringing Yamiel Lei over again?

“I understand; ask them to question Zuro Tsun about what he is afraid of. I will tell Rau Lei everything when I see him.”

“Right. If the head of the Lei house doesn’t show up, tell Ludo to ride the Totos there after his guard duty ends...”

“Huh? What?”

I thought I heard a “thank you for your hard work”, but couldn’t be sure.

“Annoying; if there’s nothing else, go.”

“Okay! I’m leaving then.”

I went outside obediently.

Anyway, I have shared all my concerns with Donda Wu.

It is the darkest right under the lantern... With Zattsu Tsun gone, the one who dealt with Pyschkurewuss the most in Forest's Edge was Zuro Tsun; we should have worked from that angle sooner.

<TL: a proverb about missing what is right under your nose>

Yamiel Lei once told me that Zattsu Tsun had given up on Zuro Tsun because of his lazy nature. That's why we felt he had nothing to do with Pyschkurewuss' conspiracy.

However, Zuro Tsun and Pyschkurewuss had more than ten years of dealings. He might not know anything about that conspiracy, but his experience was still invaluable.

We knew too little about Pyschkurewuss. If Pyschkurewuss had something on us, that would definitely drag us down. With a sense of satisfaction, I left the Wu clan.

But there wasn't anyone outside the house. Gilulu and Lulu were both eating leaves. Ludo Wu and Shin Wu were probably tired of waiting and went to their elder sisters workplace.

And Dan Lutim... As I was surveying the area, I heard a loud thud.

"Hahaha! You might be big, but you still have ways to go! You will never beat Donda Wu and me like this!"

Two large figures appeared near the entrance of the village.

The one laughing loudly was, of course, Dan Lutim and lying by his feet was Mida. There were some kids running around them too.

"A contest between hunters? No... Mida, long time no see."

I met Dan Lutim during Shumimaru's visit, but it had really been a while since I last saw Mida.

I had been visiting the Wu clan village a lot recently but didn't have time to catch up with the others as we were all busy with work. Mida who was on the ground groaned vaguely as he tried to push himself up.

“It’s Asuta… Mida wants to show Asuta something…”

“Huh? What is it?”

Mida trotted off around the Wu clan building.

Dan Lutim and I followed him and saw something surprising. It was a wooden building.

“Uwah, it’s already done?”

Mida had been constructing his own house under the tutelage of Shin Wu’s father, Ryada Wu.

I learned about this on Lala Wu’s birthday, the 25th of the Blue Month, and he was just cutting the lumber into shape back then. It had just been 15 days since then, and he had already finished. It was a little smaller than the Fa’s house, but it was as good as any other house.



“Oh! This is great!”

Dan Lutim started to clap.

“Amazing, you actually finished so quickly.”

“Yes... Mida is working hard for Asuta and Ai Fa’s sake...? ”

“Huh?”

“Mida’s old place will be returned to Asuta...”

Speaking of which, the only vacant house in the Wu village was now Mida’s room, so Ai Fa and I couldn’t lodge in the Wu clan.

Ai Fa wanted to stay in her own house as much as possible, and with Gilulu, there wasn’t much need for us to stay outside... But of course, I didn’t say something so crude.

“Thank you. You really worked hard; this is incredible.”

“Ryada Wu is the amazing one... Mida couldn’t do it alone...”

“That’s not true. If not for Mida’s strength, it wouldn’t be finished so quickly.”

Mida shook the fats on his cheeks.

He still couldn’t make a normal expression on his face because of the fats; yet, I could tell he was very happy.

Dan Lutim smiled cheerfully: “Yes, you aren’t half bad. I will ask you to help when Lutim house needs to build a new house. You have lost a lot of fats too. If you continue working hard, I will see you at the test of might contest again. Eat well and work hard!”

“Yes... Mida will work hard, so Mida can eat Asuta’s cooking next time...”

I probably won’t be asked to cook at every harvest festival. The culinary skills of Leina Wu and the other women of the Wu clan were improving too.

But it might be rude to say that.

“I’m looking forward to the next harvest festival. If I’m invited to cook, I will put on a good show.”

“Yes... Mida is looking forward too...?”

His pig-like eyes were sparkling.

His hands that had broken a stall in the Post Station Town in the past were building a new house in the Forest's Edge right now. Even someone not closely related to him was happy for him.

Be it Mida or Yamiel Lei... Aura and Zwei too. They had all overcome the pit before them—the pit of their and Tay Tsun’s crimes—and had moved on in their new homes.

What about Diga and Doddo? Surrounded by the fearsome men of the Dom house, they were probably regretting their crimes and weakness.

Anyway, I confirmed my resolve once again: If Donda Wu and the others couldn’t find any semblance of reason from Pyschkurewuss’ words, we wouldn’t let anyone destroy our new lifestyle here.

3

“Oh, we have been waiting for you, Asuta, Shin Wu!”

When we reached the Fa house, Rau Lei and Yamiel Lei were there waiting for us.

“Please teach Yamiel Lei to cook today! I will train with Shin Wu!”

“Unfortunately, my dad has a message for you, Rau Lei.”

Ludo Wu explained what happened on the back of Lulu, and Rau Lei puffed his cheeks unhappily.

“Why must I run this errand! Don’t you have a Totos too? Ludo Wu, why don’t you go instead!?”

“If you want to complain, tell that to my dad. But speaking of which... Darum-nii is in the Zaza village, right?”

Ludo Wu fell into deep thought.

“Darum-nii won’t be coming back so soon, so I will pay him a visit. But... don’t get too engrossed with training and neglect your sentry duties, okay? Rau Lei, you must have heard by now, someone infiltrated the Zaza house last night.”

“I understand! Ludo Wu, thank you!”

And so, Rau Lei stayed behind as a sentry and guard.

I still needed to prepare dinner and study cooking... and teach Yamiel Lei to cook.

“What should we do today? Do you have any request?”

“You think I will have requests...?”

Yamiel Lei was sexy and lazy today.

By the way, I didn’t really work together with Yamiel Lei before, and the women in the neighborhood had no plans of visiting the Fa house either.

“The women of the Lei house learned to cook from Lutim house. How much progress have they made?”

“Who knows... Anyway, they seemed to be stumped by hamburg steaks. Only Ema Min Lutim and Molun Lutim can make proper hamburg steaks.”

“They are stumped? I see.”

Most of the women in Lutim house learned to cook from the Wu clan women. So they were my disciple’s disciples, while the Lei house women were disciple’s disciple’s disciples. Leina Wu and Mama Mia Lei were excellent cooks, but as the information got passed further down the line, it was inevitable for the content to gradually degrade.

“The bigger the hamburg steak, the harder it is to grill. The Fou house and Lan house women also worked on it for a long time... Let’s change tact for now and try making meatballs.”

“Meatballs?”

“Simply put, they are mini versions of hamburg steak. It’s hard to undercook or overcook them.”

This was the inspiration I got when trying making kimyusu meatballs at the “Kimyusu’s Tail Inn”.

Be it the Forest's Edge settlement or the Post Station Town's inn, this was a popular and low effort dish.

“First of all, the preparation work is the same as the hamburg steak. After finishing the poitan, dice the aria.”

I used the Fa house’s dinner as an example and let Yamiel Lei try making a sample dish.

After drying the poitan, she diced the aria and minced the meat. Aria wasn’t added into the kimyusu meatballs, but I would usually add them into the stronger tasting kiba.

This was a good chance, so I decided to make some meatballs without aria.

I wondered how things would be if I used gigo to make it more sticky. The poitan needed to be dried after cooking it, unless I was planning to make grilled poitan at the same time; going out of my way to use poitan to make it more sticky was a big hassle.

The option of adding aria or not, using gigo or poitan for stickiness, there were four permutations to choose from.

“Next will be adding salt, Pico leaves and myam shreds to taste. In the Fa house, we add in a bit of fruit wine.”

“What a pain; the Lei house won’t add so many seasoning in our cooking.”

The “Kiba burger” meat patty sold in the Post Station Town only had salt and Pico leaves too, since plenty of tarapa, fruit wine, and myam were added into the tarapa sauce.

I was trying to make a sauce with Tau sauce right now and also making cheese hamburg steak and teriyaki hamburg steak. I had actually put in a lot of effort into refining the taste of the meat patty. Ai Fa also said my hamburg steak tasted better than Leina Wu’s, but I felt that our cooking wasn’t too different aside from the heat control.

“The meatballs should be about this big. You don’t need to remove the air inside either.”

It was bite-size, as big as a takoyaki.

“It’s a little too early to grill the meat for dinner; let’s grill some samples first. To stop the meat from sticking to the pot, let’s fry the kiba fats first. Keep the stove at medium fire and stir the content repeatedly, until the meat turns brown. The meatballs will break apart if you use too much force, so be careful.”

After the surface turned brown, it was time to add in myam shreds, salt, Pico leaves, and fruit wine to steam it. That concluded the cooking. Adding diced aria and cheese was just my personal preference so it could be simplified.

It might be a little late to say this, but meatballs might be more suited for the Forest’s Edge where people didn’t like complicated procedures.

“Well then, this one doesn’t have aria, and gigo is added to firm it up, so try it.”

“...Aren’t you eating?”

I started with: “I will be stuffed during dinner...”

...but then changed my mind mid-sentence and continued: “Please give me half.”

This meatball was melded by Yamiel Lei. I was the one who grilled it, but it would be a boost to her confidence if I acknowledged it.

“Hmm, I don’t have any complaints. It’s delicious.”

It wasn't flattery; I was really praising her.

The texture became smoother after adding the gigo.

Not having aria as ingredient brought out the strong taste of the kiba. Those who didn't mind the gamey taste of the kiba, which was applicable to all denizens of Forest's Edge, would prefer this taste.

Also, compared to the thin mini hamburg steak, the shape of these meatballs added more variety to the texture. It was juicy and impeccable, like a sort of pseudo hamburg steak, a dish made specifically for denizens of Forest's Edge.

What would Ai Fa say after trying this? Everyone seems happy eating it, but she is the only one with a blank face.

As I was deep in thought, I felt Yamiel Lei sighing deeply.

"What is it, is there a problem?"

"It's nothing, I think it's good. But... I'm worried. It is really fine for me to act so leisurely?"

She tilted her head quizzingly; her eyes stared at me through her long hair.

"I heard what happened to Zuro Tsun. The conference that happened a few days ago was inconclusive. What do the new tribal chiefs plan to do?"

"Ah, you are talking about that. What will happen, huh... But Yamiel Lei won't be handed over to the city."

"...Didn't they ask for all the main house members of the Tsun clan? Then..."

"Yamiel Lei, don't tell me that we should just hand you and Zuro Tsun over, okay?"

I said before she could, and Yamiel Lei sighed.

"You are really smart. The head of the Lei house only said that at the very end."

"You told Rau Lei too? He definitely lost his temper."

Rau Lei was wrestling with Shin Wu as Gilulu watched over them. I could see them, but not hear what they were saying.

Yamiel Lei turned her head to the side and flicked the hair on the left of her head.

"Not only he was furious, he even hit me. What a horrible man."

"Well, being rash is Rau Lei's flaw, but you are at fault for making him mad too, Yamiel Lei."

"..."

"Even if you are saying this to protect Mida and Zwei, don't think all will become solved by sacrificing yourself. Didn't we tell you during the House Head Conference that such methods won't work?"

"...But I was supposed to inherit Zattsu Tsun's role. Aren't the people of the city clamoring for my death?"

"I can't understand the demands of the city people. But, Yamiel Lei, you are a precious member of our tribe."

Yamiel Lei lowered her head a little and covered her face with her long bangs.

"Enough already... We can satisfy the people of the city just by doing this; I don't get it."

"That's what I should be telling you. Please understand why Rau Lei and I are mad at you."

After saying that, Yamiel Lei suddenly bit her thumbnail. A childish action that didn't fit her style at all.

"Asuta, are you mad too...?"

"Instead of mad, it's closer to being sad. Anyone will feel sad if a tribemate doesn't value their life."

“...You are a foreigner, not a tribemate.”

“I might be a foreigner, but I think of myself as a tribemate.”

Yamiel Lei became silent.

The atmosphere was getting heavy, so I said in a cheery tone:

“I don’t think the city people are interested in Zattsu Tsun’s heir anyway. They are still insisting the incident ten years ago was done by bandits, so they won’t pursue the Tsun clan’s part in those crimes.”

“Not pursuing, huh...” Yamiel Lei hid her expression and muttered softly: “Hmm... Is that why... Zuro Tsun is afraid that he will be handed over to the city...?”

“Huh? Yamiel Lei, do you know the reason?”

“Not really, but after hearing what you said, I thought about something.”

“I can’t think of anything at all, so I asked them to question Zuro Tsun.”

I unconsciously leaned closer to Yamiel Lei.

“Please tell me, Yamiel Lei. Why do you think the city people want Zuro Tsun?”

“...If they are not trying to prosecute him, there’s only one other reason.”

Yamiel Lei stared at me with dubious eyes from behind her long hair.

“To revive the Tsun clan.”

“Revive the Tsun clan...”

These words sent a chill into my heart.

“Other than that, what use are Zuro Tsun and the Tsun clan members to him? The city side isn’t happy with the new tribal chiefs Donda Wu and Graff Zaza, right? Then they will definitely want to install Zuro Tsun as the tribal chief and control the Forest’s

Edge, correct?"

I could only say... That was unexpected.

Pieces of memories and words fit together in my mind to form one conclusion.

Pyschkurewuss demanded Forest's Edge to hand over all members of the Tsun clan main house and branch house at the start. When these demands weren't met, he only asked for the main house members.

But why?

Didn't Pyschkurewuss say at the start that he did so in order to mete out the sentencing?

So Pyschkurewuss did this... not for the sake of sentencing the Tsun clan justly but to pardon their crimes by abusing his authority?

So he could veto from the position as a ruler that Donda Wu and the others were just making baseless accusations and that the denizens of Forest's Edge should follow the Tsun clan.

Now that I think about it... That explains why Pyschkurewuss isn't anxious at all. If his reason for demanding for the criminals is to bury the secret, he is taking things too slow. But if he is scheming for that other reason, spending this bit of time isn't a problem at all.

Then, his reason for demanding of the other members of the Tsun clan... was because he needed hostages to keep Zuro Tsun under his thumb, or to force Zuro Tsun to hand his position as tribal chief to his son.

The infiltrator last night wasn't there to harm Zuro Tsun but to check whether he was still alive. Saying that the punishment by the denizens of Forest's Edge was too light was a misdirection cast by Pyschkurewuss.

And, of course, I couldn't present any evidence for this. But this made more sense than our initially presumed Pyschkurewuss' plan to seal Tsun clan lips.

"But... Why is he breaking Zuro Tsun's mental state? Zuro Tsun is acting up because of

the infiltrator. Since Zuro Tsun and Yamiel Lei understood the same thing, won't that be disrupting his own plans?"

"What? It's impossible for Zuro Tsun and me to think the same. We might be father and daughter, but we are still two individuals."

Yamiel Lei said without any inflection and slowly crossed her arms.

"However... Maybe Zuro Tsun thinks that he won't dare defy the city people's demands. If he gets installed as the tribal chief, he will definitely be scorned by the denizens of Forest's Edge... And he cried when he realized that."

Yamiel Lei's shoulders quivered a little.

So I put my hands on them.

"It's fine, Donda Wu will never hand Yamiel Lei over to the city. I'm certain of it after hearing what you said."

"...But these are just my random thoughts."

"In any case, Forest's Edge does not abandon their own."

Even Yamiel Lei with the icy aura around her had warm blood flowing in her veins.

I rested my hands on her shoulders until her warm body finally stopped shaking.

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And then, night fell.

After having meatballs for dinner, I told Ai Fa:

"Things are becoming complicated. What will happen to Zuro Tsun now?"

"Donda Wu and the others will have a hard time deciding our path to the future. What we can do is figuring out the truth."

It was as Ai Fa said.

The decisive moment was upon us, and we had countless puzzles, questions, and speculations on our hands. We couldn't plan the future with just these things.

"We need to protect ourselves and wait for Kamyua Yost's return. That's all that we can do."

"No, there's one more thing, right? Convincing Geta and pulling him to our side."

"For that matter, we can only wait for him to show up. Anticipating the prey is a way of hunting too."

"That's a really hunter-like way of thinking."

Speaking of which, Donda Wu seemed very passive too. That man didn't strike easily, concealing himself and waiting for an opportunity.

I looked at Ai Fa's profile illuminated by the dim candlelight.

We weren't too far apart, leaning against the wall side by side and speaking softly. Our shoulders were almost touching.

"If an arrow is shot through the window, I won't be able to protect you if we are too far apart."

Ai Fa had been staying in this position since dinner.

She covered the window to avoid being attacked. But the night breeze felt really comfortable.

Let's stay like this before we sleep... without needing to say it out loud, we stayed at a distance where we could feel each other's body warmth and chatted quietly.

"...I want to go back to a peaceful life soon. At least to having no need to worry about people shooting at us through the window."

"Hmm? What's with you? In a bad mood?"

"No, there are just too many things giving me a headache, and if I'm not careful, I might

spur the competitiveness of others... However, if I can just live a life of worrying about Ai Fa's safe return and running my business, that will be a blissful life too."

Ai Fa pouted as she looked out the window.

Ai Fa would normally fall into silence when she heard me say such things.

Staying silent whenever she felt uneasy;, she resembled a cat in this way.

In any case, I didn't find it displeasing at all.

"But back to the topic, waiting for the opponent to show up isn't easy either. What I'm more worried about are terrible things happening to the people around me."

"Yes, but we still don't know who is the mastermind."

"That's right. If Pyschkurewuss is the mastermind behind all this, isn't his plan just repeating of history?"

"Repeating? History?"

Ai Fa tilted her head quizzingly. Her long hair brushed against her neck.

"Don't you think so? Pyschkurewuss reinstalling Zuro Tsun as the tribal chief, and spreading malice against the denizens of Forest's Edge into the hearts of the townsfolk and disrupting my business... This is returning everything to the way it used to be."

"If what you say is true..." Ai Fa said in a quiet voice. "Pyschkurewuss is undoubtedly an enemy of the Forest's Edge."

"That's right. He is definitely an enemy, and we have a reason to defeat him."

I answered half-jokingly, and Ai Fa suddenly smiled... However, her eyes were burning with rage, and those were the eyes of a hunter.

"...He's here."

She grabbed the hilt of her saber.

I followed Ai Fa's gaze in surprise and saw a pair of yellow eyes shining outside the window.

I gulped; this was akin to encountering a famished beast at night.

"Is it Geta? You want to talk to us?"

"...Come out, both of you."

The yellow phantom light was gone.

Ai Fa stood up with her saber.

She then cast her hunter eyes towards me as I stood up.

"Asuta, don't leave my side. Brace yourself; I will kick you back into the house if we are attacked."

"Got it."

We carefully exited the house.

Geta stood about 5 m from the entrance like a ghost.

He had a leopard-patterned cape, like a foreign hunter of sorts.

The pale moonlight made his figure very prominent.

"If you bear no ill will, we will welcome you. I'm the head of the Fa house, and this is my family member, Asuta."

"We already told you a few days prior that we don't want to be your enemy. Before you spread your hatred towards the denizens of Forest's Edge, I hope you can hear us out."

Geta was wearing a hood, so I couldn't see his face clearly.

But there was a beast-like glare in his yellow eyes.

However... Probably because of the moon, his body appeared smaller than before.

He was already shorter than Ludo Wu in the first place and had a slender build. I couldn't feel any rage or intimidation from him right now. If not for the rage in his eyes, he would just be a normal kid wearing a hooded cape.

"I want to ask you something before that. How did you know where we're staying? Asuta always rode in a wagon; you couldn't have kept up."

"...I followed the wagon's track here. This is easier than tracking a beast."

Geta answered from under his hood.

His voice was like an angry bolt of thunder in the past... But now that he was calm, it sounded like the hoarse voice of a teen whose voice was breaking.

After a short silence, Geta asked in an even deeper voice: "Is the great villain... really dead?"

"News that two villains had been executed is spreading in the Post Station Town. But these two weren't the only ones that killed the tens of merchants. Where are the rest...?"

"I heard that the others had all died out over the past ten years. For some reason, the Tsun clan members who took part in criminal activities all died young."

In response to Ai Fa's calm answer, Geta's eyes exploded in fury: "Bullshit! How can it be so coincidental for all the criminals to be dead? Are you covering for the rest of them...?"

"That isn't so. There weren't many who were involved with that incident a decade ago in the first place; they lured the kiba to attack the caravan. Just one man can wipe out a group of thirty by doing so."

"What about the attack on the farms two days ago? You all are a bunch of outlaws."

Ai Fa said incredibly calmly: "That's definitely not true. Someone is trying to frame the denizens of Forest's Edge. I believe that there are no hunters in Forest's Edge who would dare bring shame to our honor."

I gulped as I stood beside her, in awe of how strong and righteous she was.

Ai Fa, who didn't usually express what she was thinking to others, made a display of how strong she was... A sense of incredibility overwhelmed me.

Geta shut his mouth tightly and glared at Ai Fa.

After a moment of silence, he finally decided to speak... and a cool breeze brushed through my hair and pushed Geta's hood back.

"In order to take revenge against Forest's Edge, I trained relentlessly..."

His flame-like hair moved silently in the darkness.

"But with all those responsible dead... Who should I point my blade at...?"

Geta showed his face.

The face that was scowling with rage was now twisted from sadness.

However... Was this really the terrible assailant that brandished his blade at us in a rage?

His eyes were large and had almond shape with a slight droop at the corners. His nose and mouth were small, and his jaw was thin. He looked younger than 13 or 14 years old.

I couldn't imagine this face scowling like a wounded leopard.

But now... his yellowish eyes had a melancholic light in them.

Ai Fa asked coldly: "...Geta, why are you seeking vengeance?"

Geta's eyes became focused.

"Don't ask me something like that. It's for the sake of regaining the honor of my father that was framed, of course."

"Is that so? We are also trying to reclaim our honor that had been tarnished by our former tribal chiefs."

“...”

“Asuta told you the same thing yesterday too. Even if the Tsun clan was the one who did the crime, there must be others behind the scene too. We are battling to figure out the truth.”

“...”

“We might seem like the enemy to you. But for the sake of uncovering the truth, shouldn’t we be working together? I hope you can cooperate with us.”

Geta didn’t answer and pulled up the hood with his right hand.

His left shoulder that was covered by his grey cape could now be seen.

Geta said emotionally: “...I want to take revenge in my own way. If you have a problem with that, kill me right now. It shouldn’t be a problem for you. I’m wounded too.”

“I have no reason to kill you. I’m glad that I didn’t kill you three days ago too.”

Geta backed away wordlessly.

I called out to him quickly.

“Wait. Didn’t your mother tell you anything? Actually, our friends are searching for your mother. Her testimony might uncover the crimes of our enemy...”

“My mother... forbade me from seeking revenge. So we broke ties a year ago. That woman... had grown sullen after my father’s death.”

“A year ago... You two have been apart for so long, huh.”

“I have been living in the Marsala mountain. I went to town in order to sell a Barobaro bird I caught... And I found out about you, Asuta.” Geta said in a flat tone with his back towards us: “The denizens of Forest’s Edge are actually doing business in the Post Station Town... the felon has been brought to justice, and the denizens of Forest’s Edge were forgiven... I heard all that from a traveling merchant, and my mind turned blank from rage... And so, I came to Genos.”



"Is that so. I don't think the denizens of Forest's Edge have been completely forgiven. That's why we are working hard to build a proper relationship with the townsfolk."

Geta didn't answer.

His petite figure gradually faded away into the darkness.

I wanted to follow... but a quiet "Don't come" rejected me.

Geta then disappeared before us.

"Erm, Ai Fa... Is it really fine to let him go without a word?"

"We have no other choice. He is searching for the right path. No one can stop him."

Ai Fa stared at the direction Geta went off.

"And he has a soul similar to us. I believe he won't become our enemy. Well then... We can only wait for him to walk the same path as us one day."

"Is that so. Maybe..."

This was the best way for Geta to turn around to our side.

Since Ai Fa believed in Geta, I should do so too.

The enemy had finally floated to the surface. No matter what schemes Pyschkurewuss chose to employ, we wouldn't give in.

If Pyschkurewuss had a plan to revert Forest's Edge to how it used to be... If he deemed that the situation in the past was correct... That meant he was refuting my existence and my life amongst the denizens of Forest's Edge.

There wasn't any proof that what I was doing was correct either.

That was why I needed to face off against Pyschkurewuss with everything I had.

Ai Fa and the others acknowledged me... and I shouldn't let them down.

“It’s getting late. Asuta, let’s turn in...”

“Right.”

We then left the windy night in the Forest's Edge and rested for the sake of tomorrow.

Mid-meal Snack

“By the way, I paid Darum-nii a visit just now.”

Midway through dinner, Ludo Wu blurted that out nonchalantly, leading nearly everyone in the hall to gasp in shock.

The ones surprised were his sisters. His father and brother already heard the report, while his mother and grandmother weren’t that alarmed.

“What? Isn’t Darum-nii in the northern village, far away from here?”

“That’s right! It’s unfair for Ludo to go alone!”

The noisiest were Rimee Wu and Lala Wu. Vena Wu and Leina Wu were already waiting for Ludo Wu to continue, with eyes widely open.

“Fairness has nothing to do with this; I was tasked by Dad to relay a message to the northern village. Anyway, Darum-nii is the same as ever.”

“What do you mean by ‘the same’!? Is Darum-nii alright?”

“Didn’t someone infiltrate the northern village? Was Darum-nii in danger?”

“You all are so noisy. Darum-nii won’t be defeated by someone from town.”

Ludo Wu put some kiba chest meat, dyed in red tarapa sauce, into his mouth as he continued:

“Darum-nii was watching the prisoners inside the house during that time, so he didn’t see anything. Although someone did attempt to go near that building.”

“Someone from town infiltrating the Forest’s Edge settlement is no laughing matter. Things are getting dangerous.”

To soothe her rowdy daughters, their mother Mia Lei Wu spoke in a calm voice. Their

grandmother Ditto Min Wu and great-grandmother Jiba Wu watched quietly.

At this moment, Sati Lei Wu returned and asked with a smile: “Ara, what’s the matter?”

Sati Lei Wu was the wife of their eldest brother Jiza Wu. Their child Kota Wu was crying for milk, so she went to another room to nurse him. After being put into a cradle and cajoled to sleep, Kota Wu burped with satisfaction.

“Ludo went to visit Darum-nii! It’s unfair for him to go alone!”

When she heard Lala Wu, who was the closest to her, saying that, Sati Lei Wu smiled with an “Ara”.

“Totos are really convenient. Is Darum okay?”

“He’s the same, straight-faced as usual. Ah... but there’s one thing different about him.”

“What! Just now, didn’t you say he is the same!?”

“What’s different about Darum-nii?”

Ludo Wu backed away as his sisters pressured him. It wasn’t a change that could be explained so simply.

Darum-nii seemed troubled over something. This wasn’t a positive change, and he seemed to be looking very hard for an answer.

A lot happened to Darum-nii recently too.

Ludo Wu felt it was a hassle to explain to his sisters, so he turned towards Sati Lei Wu.

“Anyway, Darum-nii is doing well. But he complained that the food doesn’t taste good.”

“Huh, Darum actually said that?”

Ditto Min Wu retorted, and Ludo Wu nodded sagely.

“That’s because the people in the northern village eat kiba that hasn’t been bloodlet, so, of course, the food tastes nasty. They don’t have a good cook like Leina-nee either.”

“No cook can make delicious meals out of meat that hasn’t been bloodlet. Isn’t that obvious, Ludo?”

Leina Wu said with a smile to hide her bashfulness. She looked shy and happy at the same time; Leina Wu has always been passionate about cooking.

Darum-nii isn’t the only one who changed.

Ludo Wu thought as he looked at his other brother who was quiet.

“Erm, Jiza-nii, do you still think Asuta is a nuisance?”

Jiza Wu took a sip from his bowl of soup as he looked at Ludo Wu.

The eldest son’s eyes were narrowed to a slit, so it was hard to tell what he was thinking. Ludo Wu continued, worried that he had made Jiza Wu mad:

“That was a long time ago. Didn’t you say that Asuta should live in town? Do you still feel the same way now?”

“Huh? Jiza-nii said that?”

Lala Wu turned and looked at Jiza Wu in surprise. Rimee Wu who was beside her opened the eyes wide.

However, Jiza Wu just kept eating in silence.

“It was in the morning of Kaslan Lutim’s wedding, correct? It has been so long; Jiza-nii, do you still feel the same way?”

“...”

“Back then, Asuta was just running around Forest’s Edge. And now, he started a business in the Post Station Town, brought down the Tsun clan during the House Head Conference, and helped in many ways, right? More than half of the houses concur with the Fa house; what do you think, Jiza-nii?”

“...All those who concur with the Fa house are the heads of the minor houses. The Zaza

house is still opposed, while the Sauti clan is neutral.”

Jiza Wu finally spoke.

But that didn’t convince Ludo Wu.

“What the other houses think doesn’t matter. It’s your opinion I want to know, Jiza-nii. Do you still find Asuta and Ai Fa to be an eyesore?”

“...”

“Also, the Wu clan concurs with the Fa house, right? We send people to the Post Station Town to work for him, and even invited him to cook for the Harvest Festival.”

At this moment, their father Donda Wu who had been drinking all the while said unhappily: “You are noisy, Ludo.”

“What’s wrong, this is important, right? Dad is now the tribal chief of Forest’s Edge, and Jiza-nii will inherit this position. If the tribal chief and heir have different views, it will cause problems in the future.”

“That’s why Jiza needs time to think.”

Mia Lei Wu spoke this time.

“Leave the complicated matters to the clan head and Jiza, so just finish your own work properly, okay?”

“But this is the Wu clan’s problem, correct? Asuta is an important person to us, so I can’t help worrying about this.”

The oldest member of the family, Jiba Wu chipped in this time:

“Ludo, I’m happy that you said that, but... because he is an important person, and this is an important matter, we need to consider this carefully just like Mia Lei said.”

“That’s true, but isn’t Ai Fa an important person to Grandma Jiba?”

“That’s definitely true... Ai Fa is an old friend, and Asuta is an important person to me

who made me realize the joys in living... Asuta and Ai Fa are also doing something important, and it would take time to ascertain if they are doing the right thing..."

Ludo Wu didn't really get it.

But Jiba Wu definitely cherished Asuta and Ai Fa as much as Ludo Wu did. After getting admonished by Grandma Jiba, he started wondering if he was a bit too anxious.

Tch, no matter how you dice it, Asuta and Ai Fa are doing this for the sake of Forest's Edge; can't they just admit that this is the right thing to do?

Ludo Wu swallowed his dissatisfaction alongside the soup seasoned with Tau sauce.

No one mentioned the Fa house for the rest of the dinner.

Ludo Wu then laid down in his room for a while after that, and then Rimee Wu and Lala Wu visited him.

"What is it?"

"Nothing. We just want you to tell us more about Darum-nii."

Lala Wu looked angry, while Rimee Wu blinked with anticipation.

After the House Head Conference ended, Darum Wu had been staying in the northern village. He came back during the Harvest Festival, but took on the job of guarding the prisoners in the northern village shortly after that. He had been away for twenty-odd days, and his sisters were getting lonely.

The hunters of Forest's Edge would spend most of their day in the woods, so spending time together on their rest days was a blissful thing. But Darum Wu had to leave the house during this period. It was only natural for his younger sisters to feel lonely.

"With Darum-nii gone, this room seems so big."

Rimee Wu, who sat down beside Ludo Wu, looked around the room. Jiza Wu had his own room after getting married, so Ludo Wu was staying here alone.

"So, how is Darum-nii? Did anything happened in the northern village?"

"I don't know. I think it has nothing to do with the people of the north; he is pondering about something."

"But aren't the Zaza, Dom and Jean houses in the north the kin of the Tsun clan? Before Papa Donda became the tribal chief, we weren't on good terms with them."

That seemed to be the thing his sisters were worried about.

And recently, the head of the Zaza house Graff Zaza had more chances to visit the Wu clan. His sister must have seen Graff Zaza with his kiba head hood and feral eyes. Even though they weren't hunters, Graff Zaza's appearance must seem intimidating and fearsome.

"Darum-nii was asked by the Zaza house to help, that's why he went to the northern village. There's no way they would get into a fight. And also, the northern tribes were at odds with us because they followed the Tsun clan without thinking for themselves. But they now feel they had been tricked by the Tsun clan, so there's no reason for us to be enemies anymore. If not for that, Dad wouldn't have given them the position of tribal chief."

Ludo Wu suppressed a yawn and continued with his response:

"As I said, Darum-nii is thinking about something else. A lot happened between him and the Fa house, so it's only natural for him to be troubled, right?"

"Eh... Darum-nii doesn't seem to get along well with the Fa house..."

Lala Wu hugged her knees listlessly.

Donda Wu proposed that Ai Fa marry Darum Wu, but Ai Fa turned him down and chose to live on as a hunter. Not long ago, Ai Fa brought Asuta to the Wu clan, and after many tribulations, she got a good placing in the recent Harvest Festival.

There is glory in victory, but no shame in losing in the contest of might... That might be so, but losing to someone he proposed to was still a disgrace. There had never been a female hunter before, so only Darum Wu knew about this shame.

"Be it the Harvest Festival or his visit to the northern village, Darum-nii has been

acting strangely. Darum-nii... Erm, does he still want to marry Ai Fa...?"

Ludo Wu answered the listless Lala Wu: "Who knows..."

"If that is true, then it's not good for the Fa house either. Aside from Asuta, I can't think of anyone Ai Fa would want to marry."

"Yes, Ai Fa is pretty and I like her. But I think someone who will stay quietly by Darum-nii's side will suit him more!"

"Who knows. Choosing a spouse depends on the person and the house head."

"That's true... Tch, if only Darum-nii paid more attention to the people around him..."

Lala Wu knew this wasn't something she could tell Ludo Wu.

"Darum-nii isn't a kid anymore, so we don't need to worry about him finding his way. Well then... I'm turning in."

"Yes, Rimee wants to sleep too."

Rimee Wu yawned cutely and leaned onto Ludo Wu's chest.

"Hey, Ludo! It's been a while since we slept together, how about doing that tonight?"

"Huh? Why?"

"I feel lonely because Darum-nii isn't here."

"Am I a substitute for Darum-nii?"

Ludo Wu turned his head away after sticking out his tongue, and Rimee Wu shook his body: "It's fine, right!?"

"Rimee is just eight, so I can sleep with a male family member, right? I won't be able to sleep with Ludo Wu two years later, right?"

"Two years is a long time. Never mind... Where you sleep isn't my business."

Rimee yelled happily: "Don't wanna!" while Lala Wu grumbled: "Hey! Then I will be alone! I'm already 13, so I can't sleep with my brother."

"Then spend the night in Vena-nee's room. The three of you can sleep together."

Lala Wu said: "I can't even!" angrily and stomped out of the room.

Rimee Wu giggled and laid down beside Ludo Wu.

"Erm, don't you use a blanket when sleeping, Ludo?"

"Yes, it's not cold anyway."

"Is that so? But it's warm when we stick together!"

Rimee Wu said innocently as she put her head on Ludo Wu's chest.

Her red hair wriggled right before Ludo Wu's nose, and Ludo Wu patted her fluffy head.

"...Is Darum-nii really fine?"

"He's fine, trust Darum-nii."

"Yes! Since Ludo says so, I will believe it!"

After saying so, Rimee Wu buried her head in Ludo Wu's chest, and soon let off a calm breathing sound.

Ludo Wu hugged her small head and closed his eyes as he fluffed her soft hair.

◊ ◊ ◊

The next morning, when Ludo Wu opened his eyes, Rimee Wu was gone.

The women had to do chores in the morning, so she probably left at dawn. Ludo Wu stretched his back and decided to take a stroll.

When he left the house, the sun had risen higher than he expected, so instead of

venturing off, he headed for the kitchen instead. An appetizing aroma was coming from there.

The Totos tied behind the house was eating leaves with a dumb expression as usual. After patting the back of the Totos as a greeting, Ludo Wu looked inside the kitchen.

The women were hard at work. They were the four sisters of the main house and Sheila Wu from the branch house. They were instructed by Asuta to prepare the dishes to be sold in the Post Station Town.

“Ah, morning, Ludo! Why are you up so late today?”

Rimee Wu grilled mini poitan one by one and smiled at him. Lala Wu still looked grumpy though.

“You are burning tons of firewood so early in the morning again. But... I thought only three people are helping Asuta?”

“I finished my other chores, so I’m here to help. Helping is practicing kitchen work too!”

Rimee Wu answered energetically and then puffed her cheeks.

“And Rimee is the only one who can’t go to the Post Station Town... Rimee wants to work with everyone too!”

“Wait until the friction with the nobles subsides. Rimee will definitely be able to come then.”

Leina Wu smiled and comforted her. After Vena Wu got injured, she could go and work in the Post Station Town every other day, which made her very happy.

In contrast, Vena Wu didn’t look happy at all. It had nothing to do with her work in the Post Station Town; she was probably thinking about that easterner who left Genos. She was suddenly proposed to by someone who wanted to marry into the family and was told to consider it for half a year. Vena Wu must be troubled about it.

She has always been the one breaking men’s heart, so it’s fine for her to be troubled once in a while too.

Ludo Wu looked around the kitchen again.

It was like the preparation for a banquet. Leina Wu and Shela Wu made the meat patty for the “Kiba burger” one after another and then put them into the pot. In another pot was tarapa soup, which Vena Wu was stirring while sighing.

Beside Rimee Wu and Lala Wu were piles of grilled poitan. Asuta would sell 150 meals a day, so they were preparing half of that.

“Erm, I smell grilled meat, and I’m hungry. Will you get mad if I ate one?”

“Of course we will! I will definitely get mad!”

Leina Wu didn’t joke around while cooking and running a business. Ludo Wu shrugged and decided to leave.

He returned to Lulu’s side, and a familiar youth was there. It was Shela Wu’s younger brother and the head of a branch house, Shin Wu.

“Yo, you are early, Shin Wu.”

“Ah, Ludo Wu. I was thinking about taking a bath.”

The Wu clan’s watering hole was behind the main house. Shin Wu was carrying a rag to wipe himself and a change of clothes.

“I want to go with you. I’ll get my clothes, can you wait for me?”

“Alright.”

Ludo Wu walked past Shin Wu towards his home.

He changed his mind midway and looked at Shin Wu’s face.

“The bruise on your face is getting better. Does it still hurt?”

“It wasn’t that painful in the first place.”

Shin Wu was thrown down by a youth named Geta and kicked in the face. His thin face still had a faint bruise.

"Shin Wu, you are already a hunter who won't sully the name of the Wu clan. The opponent was just too strong, so don't take it to heart."

"..."

"How was your training with Rau Lei yesterday? You seemed very tired on your way back, so I didn't ask you for the details back then."

"The training is very useful. I'm grateful to Rau Lei and Ai Fa who urged as to practice."

"Is that so. There is the issue of the suitability of a training partner too. Rau Lei seems to be compatible with Shin Wu, isn't that great?"

Ludo Wu then smiled at him, but Shin Wu merely nodded. He had always been calm, but he seemed frustrated about letting Geta escape.

He can only train until he acknowledges his own skills.

Shin Wu was one of the stronger hunters of the branch houses, which was impressive since he was just 16.

But everyone in the main house was stronger than him. Ludo Wu, who was a year younger than Shin Wu, had never lost to him before.

My target is Dad and my bros.

Ludo Wu was already confident that he wouldn't lose to Darum Wu. If things went well, he could defeat Jiza Wu too. But Donda Wu and Dan Lutim were on another tier, and he even lost to Mida in the last Harvest Festival. Be it Ludo Wu or his brothers, they would chase right after their father's footstep and not be satisfied with the present.

Shin Wu regrets his lack of ability. He might cheer up if I mess around a little.

But everyone's personality was different. It would be difficult to change a person's character, so Ludo Wu could only smile at his stubborn childhood friend.

“Wait here, I will grab my clothes...”

Someone suddenly shouted from behind: “Ludo Wu!”

He looked back and saw it was Shela Wu working in the kitchen. Looking at him with eyes that resembled her brother, Shela Wu jogged towards them.

“Ah, you are here too, Shin. I have something I want to tell Ludo...”

“Hmm, what is it?”

“...Ludo, Lala Wu and the others told me that you went to the northern village last night?”

Ludo Wu was taken aback a little and then nodded.

“Darum-nii is doing fine. He seemed to be thinking about something and looked a little depressed.”

“Oh, I see...”

Shela Wu patted her breasts.

She was worrying for Darum Wu as a relative. But, given the relationship between Lala Wu and Shin Wu, there was some similarity here.

It's a fact that Ai Fa and Darum-nii are always squabbling. Someone docile like Shela Wu might be more suitable for Darum-nii.

Shela Wu has been acting strange recently too.

She used to be timid and lack confidence. She didn't have enough strength and struggled just to fetch a water flask. Ludo Wu wasn't sure since he was younger than her, but he heard that Shela Wu was often sick in the childhood.

The denizens of Forest's Edge prioritized having a healthy and strong body. This was obvious since the men needed to hunt and the women had to do laborious chores every day and raise the children.

All the men were mesmerized by Ai Fa not only because of her looks but also due to the strong life force her body gave off.

“...But Shela Wu doesn’t look bad either.”

“Huh? W-What’s the matter?”

“N-Nothing. It’s just that your cooking can rival Leina-nee’s, so you can marry any men that you like, correct?”

Shela Wu started to blush.

“W-What are you saying all of a sudden, Ludo Wu? Could it be... Asuta told you?”

“Huh? Why did you mention Asuta?”

“N-Nothing! That’s not it, so forget about it.”

He wasn’t sure if Asuta who worked in the kitchen would notice the worries of the girls and talk with them.

And Asuta was a guy as frail as a girl. However, he had the aura that could rival Ludo Wu’s father and brothers and would show the eyes of a hunter at times. He was a strange person.

“Anyway, Darum-nii is doing well. He probably won’t come back before the troublesome matters with the nobles are resolved, so don’t worry too much. Also... The people in northern villages only eat meat that hasn’t been bloodlet, so he is probably craving for Shela Wu’s cooking.”

“I-Isn’t cooking for Darum Wu the job of the main house?”

“Shela Wu’s dishes are as good as Leina-nee’s; he will definitely be happy if Shela Wu cooks for him.”

Shela Wu blushed even redder and then left after saying: “I-I still have work to do...”

“Hehehe...”

When he heard Ludo Wu laugh, Shin Wu looked at him in surprise:

“Why is Shela so frantic? And what were the two of you talking about?”

“Hmm? Shin Wu, don’t you know?”

“No, I don’t.”

Ludo Wu smile brightened, and he put his arm around Shin Wu’s neck.

“You are so interesting. I’m so glad that Shin Wu is my kin.”

“I’m happy to hear that, but I still don’t get you.”

“Alright, it’s fine for you to stay this way, Shin Wu.”

Ludo Wu was always smiling for some reason.

Everyone had a hectic time because of Ai Fa and Asuta, but they all managed to walk on the right path. Ludo Wu could feel that somehow.

Shela Wu learned to cook from Asuta and became like this. Shin Wu, who wanted Ai Fa to teach him the “Sacrificial Hunting Method” but was turned down, had been somewhat influenced too. Despite being just 17 and a girl, Ai Fa was already the head of the Fa house and lived a proper life as a hunter. Shin Wu had definitely learned something from Ai Fa.

His family from the main house had also interacted with the Fa house more now. The Fa house had a new friendship with the houses around them. After winning their struggle against the Tsun clan, Ai Fa and Asuta had found a place in the Forest's Edge that was different from before.

Be it Jiza-nii, Darum-nii, or that bunch from the Zaza house, they will acknowledge Asuta and Ai Fa one day. They are an interesting couple after all.

Ludo Wu had grown to like Asuta and Ai Fa when he first ate their cooking. That’s why he gave Asuta his blessing and wanted the foreigner to marry one of his elder sisters. Asuta and Ai Fa were getting accepted in Forest's Edge gradually, which made Ludo

Wu very happy.

“Let’s protect them properly today too! No matter who attacks, we will beat them all up!”

“Of course. We can’t lose to the same person twice.”

Shin Wu answered with a stern face, with Ludo Wu arms still around his neck.

“...Speaking of which, I want to take a bath.”

“Oh, that’s right! Wait for me!”

Ludo Wu poked Shin Wu’s head one last time before running home.

He was filled with the joy of being born in the Wu clan, and getting to befriend Asuta...
And the pride of being a denizen of Forest's Edge.

Translator's Afterword

It takes about five weeks for me to translate a volume, so splitting a volume to five parts is the most ideal situation. However, splitting the chapters in volume 10 would mean stopping at weird spots, so I ended up translating 10~15% more for the first four parts. This means that the fifth part is about 50% shorter than the norm. Instead of posting this short fifth part as it is, I decided to translate the afterwords for the first ten volumes translated so far. Also, the promotional art drawn by the illustrator こちも (Kochimo) is included, put in random order.

His art is posted on <http://kochierensyu.blog.shinobi.jp/>, so give it a look if it intrigues you.

See you next post!

Afterword V1



Thank you, everyone, for reading the first volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

I'm the author EDA, pronounced "Ehh Daa"; I hope everyone can remember me.

I started uploading this novel to the website "Become a Novelist" in August 2014. This afterword is written in January 2015. I'm still looking from the edge of the forest towards the end of this story in the distance, and I hope everyone can continue to support me online.

<TL: <https://ncode.syosetu.com/n3125cg/>

Thanks to everyone who have supported me since I started posting, this book gets to be published, and I'm very honored. I'm thankful to everyone from the bottom of my heart.

I put in a lot of effort for the sake of the old readers who supported me and the new

readers who purchased my book; what do you think about it? I hope this book suits your taste.

The protagonist who found himself in a different world gets to know the people in that world through his culinary skills! After this inspiration struck, I started writing this story. The story is developing according to my draft mostly, but there are times when it differs in small ways. Some characters shine unexpectedly, while other important characters get relegated to the background, making the project even more interesting.

I told myself that ‘such uncertain factors bring more life to the story!’ and wrote relentlessly every day. What will happen to Asuta, Ai Fa, and the various characters? I’m worried and watch over them, but this is also an enjoyable experience. If you share the same joy as me when reading it, I will feel really happy too.

Finally, I want to thank my editor from Hobby Japan, the illustrator who drew the wonderful pictures, and everyone who worked on the publishing of this book. Once again, thank you, everyone, who bought this book. I will be stopping here.

See you next volume!

January 2015, EDA

Afterword V2



Thank you everyone for reading the second volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

The structure of this volume is a little special, with a quarter of it being a side story that had never been published before.

Like I explained in the afterword for the previous volume, this work is originally posted onto the web, and each chapter is written freely by me, without any set number of words.

And so, in order to compile the chapters into a book, the previous volume was compressed a little, while a 30,000-word side story was added to this book.

There is another way though, which is adding more words to the main story. I edited the story with this in mind, but realized that expanding the chapters unnecessary will disrupt the rhythm of the story, so I changed to using a side story to expend the page count instead.

From the next volume onwards, if the word count of the main story falls short, I will think about what I need to do to give the story the best structure in order to make the story even better.

The title of the side story is *Apéritif*, and it features Ai Fa from two years ago as the protagonist.

Two years ago, her esteemed father passed away and she got into bad terms with the tribal chief clan. For Ai Fa, that was the most painful period of her life.

I have been planning to write about Ai Fa before she met Asuta since a long time ago, so I'm very happy to write this. I thought about continuing until Ai Fa met Asuta, but that felt a little unnecessary, and I wanted to write about the key scenes better too. After changing my mind, that's how the ending came about.

Asuta is the protagonist of this work and also the clown character. Without him around, the comedic element will fall drastically. The atmosphere in the side story is worlds apart from the main story, making it a slightly bitter *Apéritif*, but I hope everyone will enjoy reading it.

As for the main story, in order to make the vertical columns in the book easier to read, I did some editing and adjusted some parts that bothered me after reading through it.

Like the previous volume, I did my best to satisfy first-time readers and readers who had to peruse my work online.

The story will continue quietly.

The next volume will revolve around Lutim house and unveil more about the Forest's Edge.

New characters will make their debuts. Kochimo-sensei already illustrated Asuta, Ai Fa, and many other denizens of the Forest's Edge in a very ideal way; how will he portray these new characters? As the author, I'm brimming with anticipation.

The next volume is rather long like the first volume, so I need to compress the content properly.

I will do everything I can to bring out the best content and remove the fluff.

Ara, there are quite a number of pages in this afterword.

Asuta and company will weave more stories in the future, and I will be elated if everyone can continue reading.

Finally, I want to thank my editor from HOBBY JAPAN, the illustrator Kochimo-sensei, all the staff who helped in the publishing of this volume, and, once again, I want to give my gratitude to all the readers who bought this book.

Let's meet again in the next volume!

March 2015, EDA

Afterword V3



Thank you, everyone, for purchasing the third volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

Before I realize it, the number of volumes increased again.

This is thanks to all the readers who had supported me so far.

And this time, I'm very honored that the author of 『School-Live!』 Norimitsu Kaihō has written a comment on the book's band.

Speaking of Norimitsu Kaihō sensei, the party scene he wrote for a certain anime left a deep impression on me.

<TL: *『Gargantia on the Verdurous Planet』* >

The female characters adorned their dresses and danced more energetically than usual, and displayed a sensual side of them, unlike their usual self. In my description of the wedding, that scene would show up in my mind from time to time.

However, the banquet in my story had an unexpected ending... Asuta fell asleep before the girls started to dance. When this part was posted online, one reader commented with: 「This main character is too dense!」 .

Anyway, Asuta's life in another world is going to start officially.

I hope everyone can look forward to future installments of this series.

Then, as usual, I want to thank my editor from Hobby JAPAN, the illustrator, all the staff involved in the publishing of this work, and the readers who bought this book.

I hope to see everyone in the next volume!

May 2015, EDA

Afterword V4



Thank you, everyone, for purchasing the fourth volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

It has been half a year since the first volume was published in February.

Time seems to pass fast and slow at the same time... which is unfathomable. No matter what, thanks to the passionate support of everyone, the series managed to publish so many volumes.

My most sincere gratitude to everyone.

This volume ends with the “our battle is just beginning” phrase, and just like what it implies, Asuta and company’s fight is just starting.

Fortunately, the schedule of future volumes is now fixed, and I hope everyone can continue to like this work.

The story is finally shifting to the Post Station Town, and the next volume will continue this trend.

But there are all sorts of problems in the Forest's Edge settlement so the story will develop over there simultaneously.

The antagonist in the first volume has finally made their appearance before Asuta and company.

This series has a lot of characters.

More than thirty characters have already appeared.

The Wu clan that made their debut in the first volume is a big family of 13, including their baby. Just keeping the track of this group alone is hard enough.

When this story was being serialized, what I was most concerned about during my first meeting with my editor from Hobby Japan was, "Is it fine to have so many characters?"

Leaving that aside, what I look forward to as an author is seeing which character will be illustrated by Kochimo-sensei.

Kamyua Yost made it to the color pages in this volume.

Everyone had a different impression of this vague character which might be friend or foe, so it must be a challenge to draw him. However, I'm very satisfied with this color drawing as the author.

Personally, I'm very glad that the easterner merchant was illustrated in this volume.

Having the characters I created take visual form is a very blissful thing.

I will throw myself into my creative work with this happiness in mind.

After so much idle banter, I will end it at this point.

Then, as usual, I want to thank my editor from Hobby JAPAN, the illustrator, all the staff involved in the publishing of this work, as well as the readers who bought and read this book.

Let's meet in the next volume!

Our battle is just beginning!

August 2015, EDA

Afterword V5



Thank you, everyone, for purchasing the fifth volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

In a blink of an eye, five volumes have been published.

The last volume was published just three months ago, but it still felt so quick.

Following the last volume, the story this time describes Asuta's business in the Post Station Town.

Some readers will read the afterword first so I won't mention the details, but I hope everyone can appreciate how hard and tenacious Asuta's work ethics are.

I mentioned in the past afterwords that this story is first posted on a website. When it comes to publishing in volumes, I'm always troubled by where to stop the story.

Even when the story is at a stopping point, there is still a need to reduce the word count to compile it into a volume. Hence, I'm always troubled by the need to edit things.

I needed to cut out tens of thousands of words in this volume alone.

In terms of page count, that is 46 pages worth of words.

As you might imagine, when the story is serialized on the web, I will always write as I wish and tend to drone on. Because of this tendency of mine, editing my work will help to reduce descriptions that are too long.

Because I needed to cut out tens of thousands of words, I removed a certain key dialogue scene. If there is a chance, I hope to insert it into a future volume.

Other than that, I also edited many places to make the passages read better.

However, it will be detrimental if I cut away the interesting passages too. So this isn't an easy task.

In order to let the readers who got into this story through the published books or from the web enjoy this series, I did the best I can. Is the story satisfying to you? I hope my efforts yield good results.

Everyone can guess who the main character of the new short story is from the title, correct?

This character appeared in the previous few volumes, and I'm elated to see her featured in the colored illustrations for this volume.

When I first drafted the concept of this character, I didn't expect her to play such a large role in the story. She isn't as energetic as the Wu clan four sisters, but I hope

everyone likes her too.

I would also like to inform everyone that, starting from the fifth volume, the cover art will change a little.

The fifth volume also has its scenes depicted in the style of a photo. However, starting from this volume, I decided to emphasize more on the 「expression of a concept」.

Up until volume four, the cover was mainly 「scenes that happened in the story」, but that might not necessarily apply from this volume onwards.

Specifically speaking, the scene depicted on the cover of volume five isn't described in this volume.

I might have the chance to describe the scene happening on the cover in future volumes, but that won't happen for volume 5. I intentionally let the cover show a scene that wasn't mentioned in the volume.

Actually, when planning the cover of the past four volumes, instead of staying faithful to the story, I have always placed more emphasis on the 「expression of a concept」.

Using Asuta and Ai Fa from volume one as examples, Asuta didn't wear a bandana while he was cooking. That's because I wanted everyone to see 「Asuta's expression」 clearly. They both wore shoes despite being indoors because I wanted everyone to know 「what their attire is like」.

The cover is the 「face」 of the story, so I think 「expression of a concept」 is very important.

The scene on the cover this time is 「Denizens of the Forest's Edge Rimee Wu and Lala Wu enjoying a meal together with Tara from Post Station Town」.

Will the Forest's Edge welcome a peaceful future? I hope everyone can continue to support this work.

Well then, I will sign off with the usual. My deepest thanks to my editor from HOBBY JAPAN, the illustrator Kochimo-sensei, all the staff who helped in the publishing of this volume, and all the readers who bought this book.

I hope to meet everyone again in the next volume!

November 2015, EDA

Afterword V6



Thank you, everyone, for purchasing the sixth volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

Time flies, and the first volume has been out for more than a year.

As I'm writing this afterword, February is coming to a close; I hope everyone can take care of me this year too.

And so, this is already the sixth volume of this series.

This volume detracts from the business in the Post Station Town and focuses on the Forest's Edge settlement again.

The denizens of Forest's Edge face off directly with the negative influence of the Tsun clan.

Some readers might browse through the afterword before reading the main story so I will refrain from mentioning the story, but, compared to the struggles in the Post Station Town, this volume's content has a different appeal to it.

Asuta and Ai Fa's goals remained unchanged; I hope they can overcome all obstacles and move towards a bright future.

Ai Fa finally got onto the cover of Volume 6 after a long absence.

Speaking of which, the main heroine didn't appear on the cover of the volumes four and five.

Ai Fa can finally smile again.

Whenever a new volume is published, this series will illustrate new characters. And this time, they are all male.

And there are six of them. This is the first time we are adding illustration for so many characters. Three of them were drawn due to the strong demand by the author, so I'm very grateful for this.

To avoid spoilers, I won't mention who they are, but they made their debut at the same time.

Their names aren't revealed in this volume, but they are key characters for this arc, so I strongly wished for them to be illustrated.

In a sense, they were scarier than Papa Donda.

When I first received the draft illustration, my heart skipped a beat from how intimidating they looked.

This humble author realized once again how fortunate I am that Kochimo-sensei is doing the illustration for me.

Next is the mid-meal snack that is published for the first time. I chose the easterner

Shumimaru who didn't show up in this volume as the main character.

As the main story was rather serious, I was planning to write about the wonderful lives of a cute girl in the mid-meal snack, but when I realized it, the mid-meal snack was as serious as the main story.

The author really likes Shumimaru, and I hope everyone will like this story as well.

Well then, in the next volume, Asuta and the others will get embroiled in new tribulations.

They will restart their business in the Post Station Town.

Kamyua Yost who had been quiet for some time will make an appearance again.

In order to let the readers enjoy this work, the author will strive forth too.

Well then, I will sign off with the usual by thanking my editor from HOBBY JAPAN, the illustrator Kochimo-sensei, all the staff who helped in the publishing of this volume, and all the readers who bought this book. Allow me to give you my most sincere thanks.

Let's meet again in the next volume!

February 2016, EDA

Afterword V7



Thank you, everyone, for purchasing the seventh volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

If the book goes on sale according to schedule, half a year of 2016 should have passed by now.

The speed that time goes by surprises me every time.

And during this time, the seventh volume of this series has been published successfully.

This is thanks to the support and care of all the readers, and I wish to express my deepest gratitude to everyone.

Because there was too much content for this volume, I had to edit the drafts by a lot.

The story didn't change too much, but I actually cut away roughly 60 pages of the original draft. This is the first time I compressed the content by that much.

Since the number of pages exceeded the norm by this much, you might think that splitting this into two volumes would be easier. However, I prefer to end this story in just this one volume.

Compressing the passages is both joyful and sad. I pray that going through this arduous and happy process will bring about better results.

The mid-meal snack is centered around Leina Wu.

I wrote a lot of side stories for the other characters, but this is the first time I let Leina Wu take center stage.

On second thought, aside from Rimee Wu in the first volume, I had not written any side stories for the Wu clan main house four sisters yet. They were central figures in the stories, so it was hard for me to write about them.

I will want to feature the other Wu clan sisters as the main character in the future so everyone will have a chance to read a side story about Vena Wu and Lala Wu.

Two innkeepers are illustrated this time.

For readers who like old men, this must be a joyous occasion.

Aside from them, I also asked the illustrator sensei to draw a middle-aged man who made his debut in this volume, but we had to give it up because of the page planning of the book. In the next volume... he won't make an appearance either. The author hopes he will get to be in the limelight one day.

And so, the next book is volume 8.

To avoid spoilers, I won't mention the story, but the author had a lot of fun writing volume 8.

The 6th and 7th volumes are more serious so the readers can look forward to a cheery story. The atmosphere won't be too different, but the content is more warming.

The story structure will resemble episodic short stories. The posts I'm publishing recently is done in a similar way too.

The content isn't too different from before, so do look forward to the next volume's development.

Let me add some additional information. As there are plenty of pages in the next book, I might insert a side story I published online, or write tens of pages of new side story like I did for volume 2. I'm still considering both options.

Finally, I will sign off with the usual thanking of my editor from HOBBY JAPAN, the illustrator Kochimo-sensei, all the staff who helped in the publishing of this volume, and all the readers who bought this book. Thank you, everyone.

I hope to meet everyone in the next volume!

May 2016, EDA

Afterword V8



Thank you, everyone, for purchasing the eighth volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

I informed everyone in the last volume that this book will comprise of several short stories.

It is mainly about the events before the denizens of the Forest's Edge face off against the nobles.

The chapters are short, but these aren't side stories, and I hope the readers can enjoy

this volume as usual.

Thinking back to how I felt when penning this part where the denizens started opposing the Tsun clan and nobles, the all-important cooking element got sidelined. I wrote these side stories back then with such feelings of regret.

When writing these short stories, I intentionally separated it with the previous volume. I wanted to describe life in the Forest's Edge in further detail from the new chapter onwards.

I'm sorry for analyzing my own work so objectively, but these stories were written by me in late 2014 to early 2015, and it had been a year and a half since then.

It is really surprising how time flies.

When the book is published, I won't normally think about the time when I first wrote the draft, but this volume left a deep impression on me.

Why? In the uploaded post for the New Year of 2015 I intentionally made Asuta say:
「Congratulations! I will be in your care in the future too.」 .

<TL: A standard thing to say in Japan for New Year>

I can publish my story online immediately, that's why I can pull off such a playful move. I removed these words in the book version, so the readers can guess where Asuta said that line.

For the side story, I wrote something from the perspective of Vena Wu.

This story fills me with emotions.

I thought up this story a long time ago and decided to write it out one day.

Without any spoilers, this is about Vena Wu meeting a certain character five years ago. People who read the main story might be curious: 「Vena Wu's residence is so far from that person's house, so how did they meet?」 This is my answer.

The women in Forest's Edge don't really spend much time heading to other people's house. If two people live too far apart, they might not get to know each other forever. At most, they might meet each other when shopping in the Post Station Town.

And so, when that character appeared in the main story, why did Vena Wu know her? This is the reason I thought up, and to this day, I never had the chance to write it in detail.

I checked, and that character debuted in the main story in October 2014, which is volume five of the book version.

When I saw that character debut two years later, I felt glad that I could finally unveil how that character met Vena Wu.

That's all for the afterword in this volume, my page count is done.

These might just be some behind-the-scene stories, but I feel this is the interesting part of an afterward, and I hope everyone will like it.

Well then, I will sign off, as usual, by thanking my editor from HOBBY JAPAN, the illustrator Kochimo-sensei, all the staff who helped in the publishing of this volume, and all the readers who bought this book.

Let's meet again in the next volume!

August 2016, EDA

Afterword V9



Thank you, everyone, for purchasing the ninth volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

The series doesn't have any specific arcs, but after the "Forest's Edge settlement arc" and "Genos Post Station Town arc", we will finally be moving into the "Pyschkurewuss arc".

The denizens of Forest's Edge, who knew this bastard by name only all the while, will be facing off directly against him.

That might be so, but the protagonist Asuta is just a chef, and he won't be trading his kitchen knife for claymore or halberds, and he will just perform the job he is supposed to do.

And in this volume, more new characters made their debut.

As Shumimaru's and Pops Balan's groups will be leaving Genos, there will be many new characters taking their places.

All the new characters act independently, but what kind of relationship will they build with Asuta and the denizens? I hope everyone will continue following their story.

I just received the draft of the non-colored illustration today and saw the designs for Psychuurewuss and the new characters today.

I have the habit of explaining the fine details, which gives a lot of work to Kochimo-sama. Thanks to his great effort, the finished product is outstanding this time too. I'm very thankful to Kochimo-sama.

Everyone should have noticed from the title of the mid-meal snack that it is a story about Pops and the southerners.

I was writing a sweet story about Shin Wu and Lala Wu in the beginning, but I gave up due to the page count and other factors. I hope that I will have the chance to share this story with everyone.

Pops and his gang have yet to return in the web story yet, and it has been a year and a half since I wrote about them. May the light shine on those middle-aged men.

Well then, my page count is almost up.

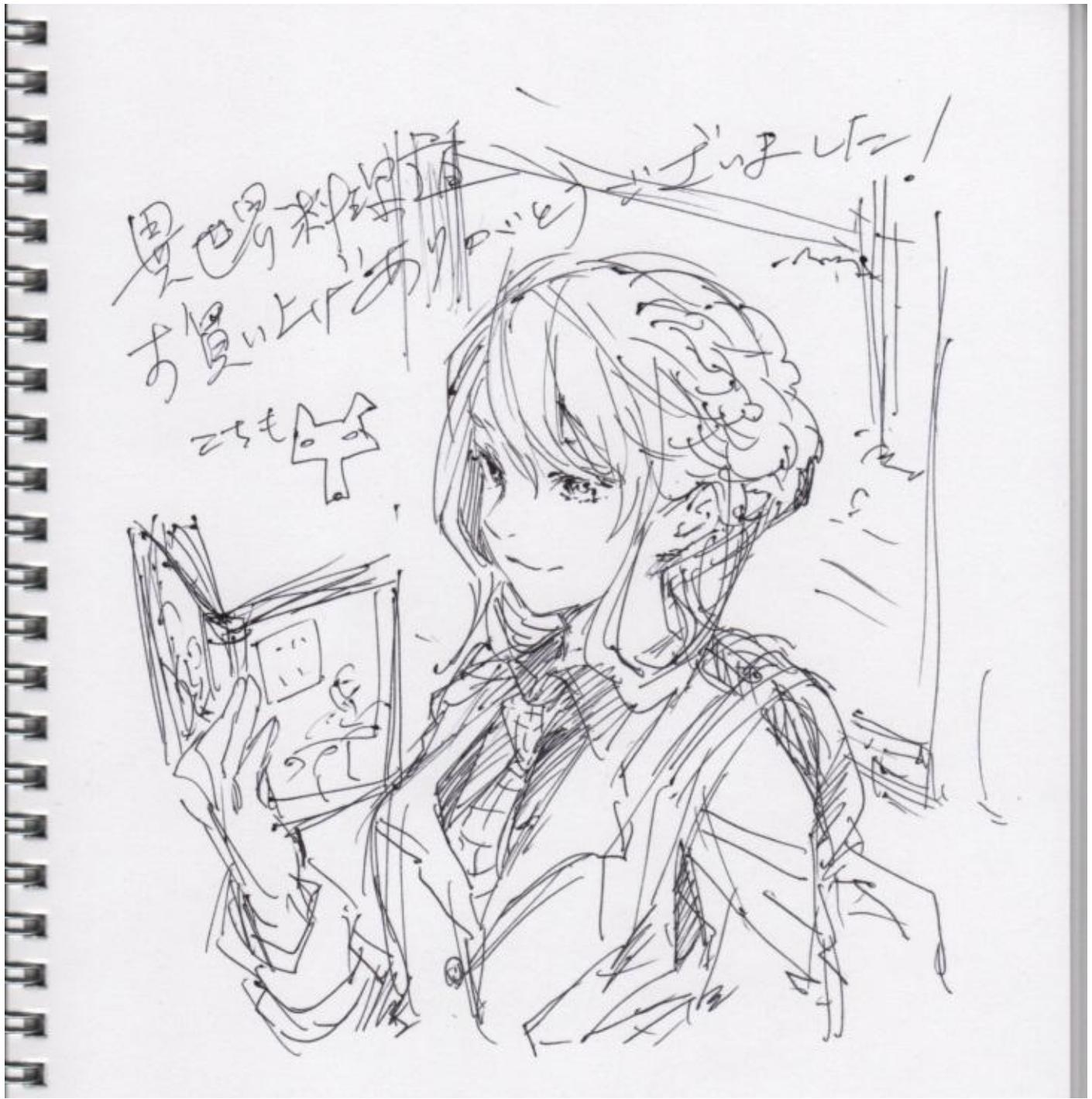
Actually, the afterword is written in the leftover pages when publishing a book. If I insisted that 「I want to write an even longer afterword!」 it might add 16 more pages, which would be a problem.

Finally, I will sign off with the usual gratitude towards my editor from HOBBY JAPAN, the illustrator Kochimo-sensei, all the staff who helped in the publishing of this volume, and all the readers who bought this book.

We will be breaking into two digits in the next volume, let's meet again then!

November 2016, EDA

Afterword V10



Thank you, everyone, for purchasing the tenth volume of [Cooking with Wild Game].

The series has finally reached its tenth installment. I'm very proud of the number of volumes reaching double digits.

This is only due to everyone who accompanied me all this way. I'm bad in expressing

myself, but I still wish to give my most sincere thanks to everyone.

The ones on the cover of this memorable volume are the men of the Wu clan. I'm very moved by this, as the fearsome Papa Donda Wu has never been featured on the cover before.

On the side note, the mid-meal snack is also about the Wu clan, in line with the cover. The illustration on the inside cover is so cute. It is told from the perspective of the mischievous youngest son Ludo Wu. Please look forward to it.



<TL: Pic above is what the author is talking about>

Next will be some idle chatter. At the end of the volume is an advertisement for my work that is being published in Kadokawa. I will be happy if you support me in that series as well.

<TL: <https://store.kadokawa.co.jp/shop/g/g321609000487/>>

The afterword is just two pages this time, so I have to keep things brief.

I will conclude, as usual, by thanking my editor from HOBBY JAPAN, the illustrator Kochimo-sensei, all the staff who helped in the publishing of this volume, and all the readers who read this book; I'm very grateful to everyone.

Let's meet again in the next volume!

February 2017, EDA



PtF by: traitorATZEN